

Consumer Preferences of Travel Web Content

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<p>The purpose of this Bachelor's Thesis was to study the web content preferences of users in online travel. The research was done for the commissioning party, TripAhead, a start-up online travel organizer, in order to help get insight into the consumer opinions and preferences. Moreover, the thesis researches which web content features affect the consumer the most into choosing a holiday destination, and essentially purchasing a service or product from a travel website. Additionally, the traveller and their travel habits are combined into the study.</p> <p>The main concentrations of theoretical framework were mostly on the consumer behaviour (online) and the web content of travel websites. The web content was divided into four major categories: visual, informational, practical and social, and these aspects were a major part of the research done. This base knowledge thus helped in creating the research questions for the study.</p> <p>The research conducted was based on both quantitative and qualitative research in the form of an online survey, done both in English and Finnish. The main focus was on the quantitative research, meaning the results obtained would be in numerical form. The qualitative research was a minor, but important, part of the research to get insight into the respondents' real opinions and was incorporated into the online survey in the means of an open question.</p> <p>The final results of the analysis proved that the consumers in question valued visual and informational content by category the most, and the most important content features when deciding upon a holiday were user reviews & comments, informational texts and photos. The results also showed that the USPs of TripAhead are considered important by the consumer, and therefore the website does have a potential of succeeding amongst the tough competition.</p> <p>The conclusion was drawn up from the results of the analysis, and this was then used to give suggestions to TripAhead, including adding a customer review and comment section onto their website, having a diverse array of photos from destinations as well as offering a e-newsletter of upcoming promotions.</p>	
Keywords Web content, online content features, travel website, consumer behaviour, research, OTA	

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1 Introduction

Year after year the number of travellers seems to be increasing, and the international tourism market is at its peak, and merely keeps on growing. In 2013, the world record of travellers per year was broken, with 1,082 million arrivals worldwide—equaling to a 5% increase compared to the previous year. Furthermore, tourism is expected to grow by 4-4,5% during the year of 2014, equaling to a new world record to be broken this year as well (UNWTO 2013, 10).

Due to the major growth in tourism, the preferences, trends and usability of tourism are constantly changing and meanwhile the technology used for tourism and travel is advancing and increasing. Travellers rely more and more on online sources and outlets for tourism, and enjoy the effortlessness of reserving a holiday with a mere click of the mouse. As of 2013, 80% of travellers used the Internet as at least one base of planning their holiday or travels (Google & Ipsos MediaCT 2013, 10), which just goes to show that online travel planning and purchasing is something that needs attention and concern. It is safe to say, that nearly all travel companies are somehow affiliated with the Internet today, and most of them offer the possibility to book tourism services or products online (i.e. hotels, flights, tourism activities etc.).

1.1 Reasons for the thesis

The thesis that is being conducted, is devoted to the TripAhead case, and its outcome will help the company see how different web content features affect their consumers' decision to purchase—or not to purchase—a product from their website. Therefore, the company will be able to alter their web content to be attractive to the consumer. Additionally, the thesis outcome will show in general what Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) should focus on their websites in order to attract more consumers and more purchases.

Moreover, this thesis and the thesis topic are being conducted for its importance to the tourism and travel field. A similar study has been done in 2012, but with a main focus on Malaysian travellers, and thus this thesis will add onto the results of that study, and most likely give a different set of results. When it comes to booking a holiday or trip online, the most used online sources of leisure travellers were (in order of importance) search engines, hotel websites, airline website and OTAs (Google & Ipsos MediaCT 2013, 11). The last three Internet sources mentioned are all online, thus needing a different set of web content, which may or may not affect the purchase decision. Considering that close to

50% of consumers at least visit an OTA when planning a holiday (Google & Ipsos MediaCT 2013, 11), the right web content and design of the websites could attract even more consumers to purchase travel products. In addition, the research will contribute to the already existing data of preferred web content in the online travel sector.

1.2 Thesis topic and questions

The theme of this thesis is e-tourism, and more specifically the web content of travel websites. The purpose of this thesis is to conduct a research for the start-up online travel organizer TripAhead.com to find out the online content features that affect the consumer to purchase a holiday. According to the outcome of the research, the commissioning company will be able to improve the website to make it more appealing and easily usable to the consumer, as well as increasing the likeliness of purchases by the consumer from their website.

In the initial phases of this thesis, basic information was gathered about the commissioning company, and meetings held with the co-founder Krista Manninen, discussing which aspects are beneficial to the company to be researched. According to the initial research and discussion held, below are the primary questions that should be answered as an outcome of the research done.

- Which travel web content features affect the consumer to decide and purchase a holiday or trip? The main purpose of the thesis is to scope out the different web contents, and to see which ones encourage the consumer the most.
- Are some features greatly more important than others? Additionally, which features seem to be less crucial when deciding on a destination?
- Which type of web content is most important to the user? To scope out the type of web content considered most important by users (visual, informational, practical or social content).
- How can TripAhead improve their website to be favorable to the consumer? Which features should they emphasize on and use, and which ones to discard from their website?

Generally, by conducting this research, the author is hoping to find out which website content features are more important to the consumer versus other features. For example, does the consumer value photos, versus integrated Google Maps when basing the purchase decision? The author is expecting to get varying results, as many smaller factors

affect the purchase outcome as a whole; however there may be some specific features, which will stand out as most important and least important to the purchase decision.

1.3 Introduction of TripAhead

The reason behind choosing TripAhead as the commissioning company is because the author has been doing her managerial work placement for this company. Since TripAhead is still a fairly new company, the author wanted to help improve the website, as well as benefit from writing a thesis about it. The author's position has been head of destinations and the company blog. The main tasks have consisted of choosing destinations and writing descriptions of them as well as maintaining the blog and writing blog posts.

TripAhead is an online travel booking and planning website for independent travellers with an affiliate business model. The main purpose is to inspire, offer information and help independent travellers with their holiday planning to create the best possible holiday. In addition, it should provide earnings to the founders, so that they could concentrate on working only for the company (Manninen 26 October 2014).

TripAhead was established in July 2013, and the launch of the actual website was on 1st of September 2014. The founders of the company are Krista Manninen, Antti Manninen and Kalle Manninen, and it is a family-run company. The vision of TripAhead is to be the best holiday planning service for independent travellers. The mission is to make holiday planning and booking easier for independent travellers in an inspiring and fun way. The partners of TripAhead are Bravofly and Expedia Affiliate Networks (Manninen 26 October 2014).

To explain the process of online travel booking of the traditional outlets, versus TripAhead's concept, Figure 1 and Figure 2 will be of assistance. In Figure 1, the process of how independent travellers book their holidays as of now is shown. The initial phase is to search for information of different destinations by using websites and search engines (such as Lonely Planet, Google, travel magazines). Once the initial decision of a specific destination has been made, the consumer will start to search for hotels and flights to the destination from different websites (such as airline websites, booking.com, Trivago and other flight websites). Finally, once the search has been completed through several different outlets and sources, the consumer will choose upon a hotel and flight, or perhaps they will not buy anything (Manninen 26 October 2014).

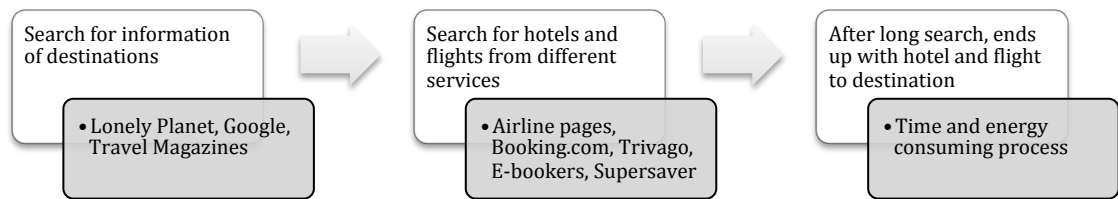


Figure 1. Phases of information collection and booking by independent travellers currently. (Manninen 26 October 2014).

In Figure 2, we see the process of TripAhead, which seems already much clearer. The primary phase is to search for inspiration and information of destinations from TripAhead's website. Once a destination, or multiple destinations have been decided, the consumer can then search for combined hotel and flight from the chosen destination(s), and the results can be compared on one single page. Finally, the consumer can choose the preferred hotel and flight to the destination, and has saved much of their precious time by using TripAhead. So, basically, we can say that all the relevant information and booking tools are all in one website, making it simpler and time-efficient. TripAhead is also developing new features which will increase the competitive advantage of their website (Manninen 26 October 2014).

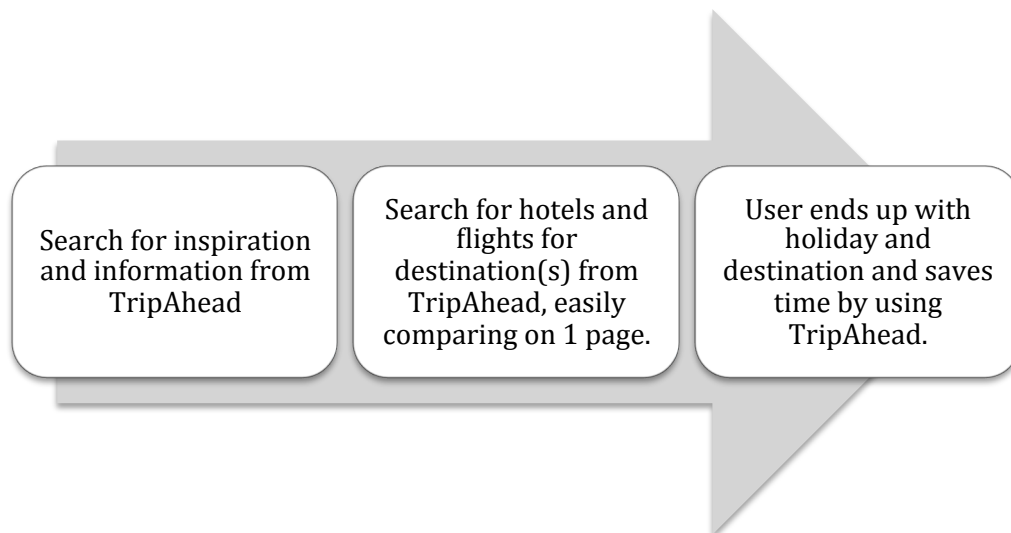


Figure 2. Phases of information collection and booking with TripAhead. (Manninen 26 October 2014).

Overall, the main difference can be seen between the current booking and information collection phases of an independent traveller and through TripAhead, which is easiness

and simplicity. It is the practical functions, which constitute some of TripAhead's USP's, such as choosing the destination according to type of holiday versus the physical destination. Additionally, their USP is being able to compare the results of same criteria (and different destinations) easily on one webpage. TripAhead offers all the information in one website, which a traveller would traditionally need to look for using several different websites. Therefore, the process saves energy, tiredness and time, making the process fun and inspiring!

1.4 Thesis report structure

The thesis report structure will be presented to the reader as follows. Firstly, theoretical aspects concerning the thesis topic will be explained, focusing on two main theoretical areas. The main areas include the consumer behavior and customer purchase cycle as well as website content and its features in online travel.

After the theoretical part of the thesis, the presentation of the case and research methods will be presented, explaining the process of creating the research and executing it. Following this, the research outcomes will be analyzed and explained, including the conclusion of the research outcome and suggestions for the commissioning company. Lastly, the process of the making of the thesis and the research will be evaluated, as well as a self-evaluation of the author's work throughout the thesis process.

2 Consumer Behavior and Purchase Cycle

This chapter is the first of two chapters of theoretical framework for the basis of the thesis research. The chapter focuses on the consumer behavior, how they behave and what affects their purchase decision. The more traditional concepts will be explained, but the online (purchase) behavior will be the focus of the chapter, since the thesis concentrates on online purchasing.

In order to advance onto the consumer behavior and their purchase cycle, the AIDA marketing model will be briefly reviewed as a base to the research. The abbreviation of AIDA consists of Attention, Interest, Desire and Action, and it is a simple yet powerful tool of marketing to the consumer. The business firstly needs to attract the attention of the potential consumer, most often by means of catchy advertisement. Once the consumer's attention has been caught, the company needs to imply a means of interest of the consumer towards the product or service. This means, that the consumer may need to get a feeling of the product, reasoning as to why he or she needs it, and what will be benefited from purchasing said product.

The next step, desire, is quite different from interest. In this step, the consumer needs to feel the desire, or need, towards the product. Having merely interest does not imply that the consumer will purchase the product, but once they have the desire, it is more likely for them to purchase. The consumer may create a feeling of need for the product, based only the desire they have accumulated. Finally, the last step, action, is the encouragement of the consumer to purchase the product, thus taking action based on their desire. These four steps are a great base knowledge to the consumer behavior, from the company's point of view (Rawal 2013, 39-40).

2.1 Consumer Behavior

Identifying the consumer behavior and intentions for purchase is nearly impossible, since each consumer is different and affected by human diversity. Many consumer behavior studies are done to research the trends of behavior, because the field of consumer behavior is relatively vast. The definition for consumer behavior is best explained with the definition below:

“...it is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires” (Solomon 2013, 31).

Since a consumer can be anyone who fulfills one or more of the above-mentioned criteria, the majority of people are consumers. Therefore, an extensive amount of potential consumers exists, but it is up to the company as to how to attract them. Since the human mind is a complex dynamic aspect, there are many different phases and aspects, which constitute the consumer behavior.

Hoyer, McInnis & Pieters define the consumer behavior beginning with the consumer's psychological core. This consists of the consumer's effort for decisions (motivation, drive, goals), moving from exposure to understanding, consumer's memory and existing knowledge, and attitude formation and change (2013, 183).

From the base of a psychological core, human behavior can be researched based on four major segments: demographic, geographic, psychographic and behavioral. These four segments constitute each person's self, and make each of us unique while affecting our behavior (Cline, Croney & Kardes 2011, 46).

Demographics include factors such as gender, sexuality, culture, religion, age, ability, language and nationality (Abrams & Moio 2009, 245) and these are all a part of defining human diversity.

Geographics refers to the physical geographic area the individual has lived in. Examples of geographic segmentation are continent, country, district, city or even smaller geographic areas. Additionally, geographics can include rural, suburban or urban areas, as well as location based on climate or even population (Hoyer, McInnis & Pieters 2013, 183).

The psychographics of a consumer include values, personality and lifestyles (Hoyer, McInnis & Pieters 2013, 183). Babin & Harris note that psychographics is actually the means of researching a consumer's lifestyle, which thus brings out certain customer segments according to consumer's activities, interests and opinions (2014, 113). The behavioral segment contributes to all of the previous three segments, and it identifies how humans behave in certain situations, what are their habits and customs and regular behavioral patterns.

In addition to the psychological core and the four different segments, social influences affect the consumer's behavior. Social influences consist of factors such as roles, family, electronic networks, reference groups and opinion leaders (Ferrel & Pride 2014, 168). Social class, or social status, can be primarily based on purchasing power of a consumer (the more purchasing power, the higher status), and how individuals are grouped into different classes according to similarity (Carlson, O'Cass, Paladino & Schiffman 2014, 360).

2.2 Consumer Behavior Online

The modernizing world and growing technology is enabling consumers to have ease and efficiency in purchasing goods and services. According to eMarketer, the worldwide online sales are currently in the trillions (USD), and are constantly growing. The forecasts show an increase of 9-19% between years of 2013 to 2018, meaning that the sales in 2013 of \$1.233 trillion, will be totaling \$2,356 trillion in 2018, which is nearly doubled in a short period (eMarketer, 2014, online). With astounding online sales, companies need to understand the consumer behaviors online, in addition to the traditional consumer behavior, since there is somewhat of a difference. In addition to this, the growth of OTAs is estimated to increase by 12% yearly, having \$150 million in gross bookings in the year 2013. The online travel market represented 13% of the whole global travel market in 2013, which is a huge number, especially if it keeps growing in the future (Trefis 2015, online).

According to Belew & Eland (2014, 508-509), there are several differences between the online and the offline consumer demands. The online consumer is in a virtual shopping world, which differs substantially from the physical store and products. Online, the consumer is able to do extensive research on the products or services in question, as well as having multiple outlets to browse for those hard-to-find items, which may be out of stock in physical stores. Additionally, online shopping offers the possibility for finding specialty items, adding convenience to the shopping experience with its round-the-clock shopping, as well as adding value to the experience, by for instance emitting the time that would otherwise be used for traveling to the store. Finally, online shopping offers varying prices, which are easily compared between websites, as well as extended inventory since shelf-space is not a problem for Internet shops.

Frost & Strauss (2013, 178) explain that the online consumer is affected by technological, and social & cultural contexts as to how they behave online. The main technological aspects affecting online users are the speed of the Internet, as well as the mobility and versatility of different devices. Users rely on a faster Internet speed nowadays, and if the

speed is too slow, the purchase may be left on the net. This is unfortunately something that the company in question is unable to affect, however using fewer pop-ups and ads may increase the speed of downloading pages for the user. Additionally, consumers are becoming more mobile, and being able to track, purchase, explore and research, whilst on the go, is a necessity nowadays.

The social and cultural contexts then affect the user. Online consumers are becoming less patient, and have a lower concentration span. The modern-day cornerstones of attracting online users are reputation, relevance and engagement. Reputation is what builds the brand image, and the growing social media is what users look to for advice from fellow online users. Thus, trust and honesty is something that is highly valued in the online business world. The second cornerstone, relevance, is quite self-explanatory. Consumers want content that is related to what they are searching for, or relevance to the website they are visiting. By having, for example, a newsletter for the website, is something that consumers may use, since the content of the newsletter will be of relevance to the desired website. Engagement is the third and final cornerstone of attracting online users. Engagement can be divided into three main pillars of customer engagement; content engagement, media engagement and engagement marketing (Frost & Strauss 2013, 179,182,183).

Keeping these factors in mind, modern online users have adapted several characteristics, which shape up their consumer behavior.

1. Information overload overwhelms the online consumer, and creates an attention economy (the demand for limited information is non-existent). This is why, for example, consumers have little tolerance for spam.
2. Especially Generation Y has adopted multitasking, since it speeds up normal processes and saves times, however lowering the attention-spam per task.
3. The boundaries between home and work are now very vague and hard to separate from each other.
4. Online users are commonly busy people, so convenience and the motto "I want what I want when I want it" is more and more common.
5. The term "online oxygen", meaning that consumers are unable to do without Internet access—they crave it.
6. Being constantly connected, through the help of social networking.
7. Staying in the know, being ahead of online and technological trends.
8. The ability for self-service, especially on the Web.
9. Having the possibility of privacy and data security from online companies is considered important, especially in Europe.

10. Different online users have different online behavior, according to demographics and attitude towards technology.
(Frost & Strauss 2013, 183-185).

In brief, the modern online consumer is hugely different in their behavior compared to that of the traditional consumer. The modern consumer may not be as predictable as the traditional consumer; they need more attention and engagement, which in the online world is more challenging than the face-to-face interaction of the traditional consumer. The online consumers are used to efficiency, convenience and saving time. Time is of essence in this modern online world, not only to the consumer, but also to the supplier.

2.3 Decision Making Stages

The segments and factors affecting the human behavior, affect their decision-making when purchasing items. The basic decision-making stages are shown below in Figure 3, and the online decision-making process will be explained in section 2.4 of the thesis.



Figure 3 Consumer Decision Making Stages. Adopted. (Bateson & Hoffman 2011, 87 & Solomon 2013, 320)

Solomon states there to be five stages of Consumer Decision Making, and that the stages are a continuous cycle, the last stage always coming back to the first stage (2013, 320). On the other hand, Bateson and Hoffman describe six stages in the process, and do not mention it being continuous (2011, 87). The two models have been thus adopted by the author, and formed into one unified model of the Customer Decision Making Stages. In short, the customer goes through these 6 stages upon making a decision, and is drawn back to the beginning of the cycle.

The first stage in the model, stimulus, is based on Bates & Hoffman's idea of the model (2011, 87) and is not included in Solomon's model. The stimulus creates the problem recognition, and this may be an advertisement or other type of stimuli, which makes the consumer feel and believe that they "need" the product or service. In the tourism field, the

stimuli could be, for example, a photograph of the beach and sea, which then sends signals to the consumer that they need a beach holiday. This then leads to information search, in which the consumer finds relevant information of the product or service to understand it better. Once the basic knowledge has been researched, the consumer evaluates the different alternatives for the product. This may include comparing prices, quality, or other benefits of each brand or company of the same product/service.

Once the consumer finds the right brand or company of the product/service, the product is then chosen and purchased (or booked, in the case of travel). Finally, the evaluation and outcome of choosing said product. The consumer decides if they liked the product, and the experience that came with it, and from this they may convey their experiences and feelings to others. This may also act as a stimuli to the next person. The cycle then repeats itself with a different stimulus for the consumer. From this basic idea, the purchase cycle can be built upon, with the perspective of travel.

2.4 Travel Purchase Cycle

When referring to a physical product, the consumer commonly uses the 6-stage decision making process, mentioned above. However, a tourism product is relatively more complex, consisting of different services and activities instead of one single product, which in turn create the full experience, which the traveller is initially purchasing. Therefore, although based on the mentioned decision-making stage in section 2.3, the decision-making of a holiday is more complex, since there are multiple separate factors to consider (Olga & Raj, 2013, 34).

2.4.1 Traditional Purchase Cycle

The traditional customer purchase cycle for tourism products consists of five phases; dreaming, planning, booking, destination and post-holiday sharing, which can be seen in Figure 4 (below). Again, this cycle can clearly be linked to the decision-making process explained in section 2.3.

Dreaming refers to the stimuli, or the consumer's problem recognition phase, which consists of the Media and Retail. The dreaming phase is when the consumer gets the idea of needing to travel, needing a holiday or needing to see something new. The planning phase is about collecting information from different outlets and different destinations, and this consists of Word-of-mouth and Retails. This phase includes collecting thoughts of

other travellers' experiences, I mostly being friends, since the method is by word-of-mouth.

The booking phase constitutes the concrete purchasing of the product, or making the decision for the specific destination. Booking in the traditional cycle includes only Retail, which traditionally includes mainly the travel operators and providers, such as several different travel agencies. The destination phase is the consumption of the product, or simply put, being on the chosen holiday. In this traditional cycle, there is simply consumption of the product during the destination phase, nothing more. Finally, post-holiday sharing is the evaluation of the experienced product, and this is done by word-of mouth, most likely to friends, family and acquaintances (Tourism Australia, 2013, 7).

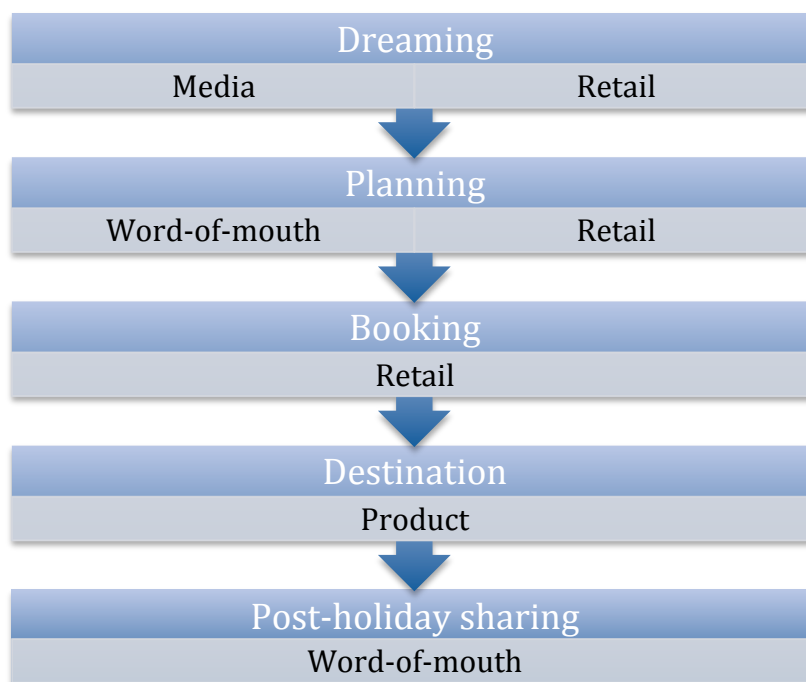


Figure 4. Traditional travel purchase cycle. Adopted. (Tourism Australia, 2013, 7).

It can be clearly seen from Figure 4, that the travel cycle from the traditional standpoint is fairly straightforward and simple, with minimal outlets, and very simple ways of information processes.

2.4.2 Modern Purchase Cycle

Due to the rise of the Internet and online sales, the modern purchase cycle, compared to the traditional cycle, is fairly complex with multiple outlets and ways to research. As with the traditional cycle, the modern cycle also consists of the same five phases: dreaming,

planning, booking, destination and post-holiday sharing. However, the touch points of each phase are different and more extensive (as seen in Figure 5, below).

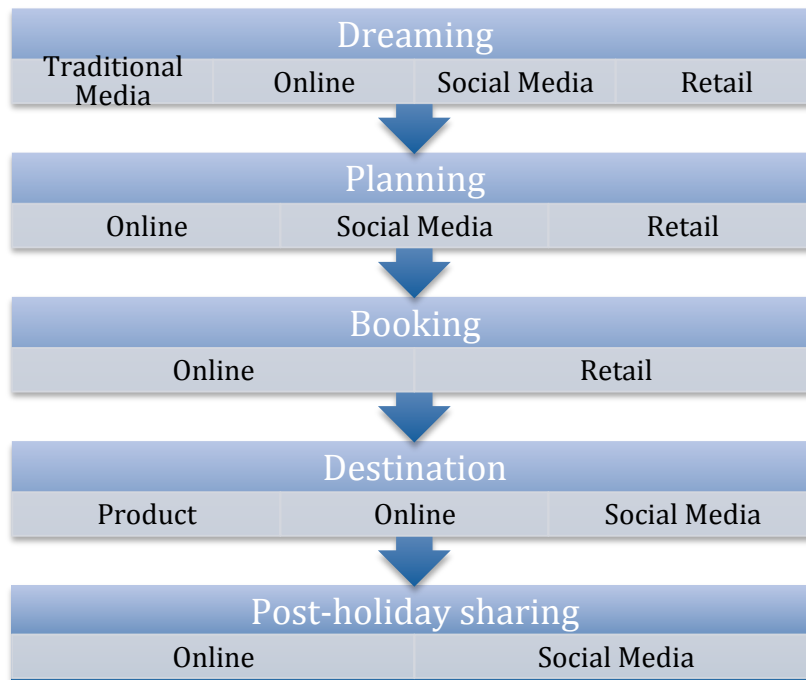


Figure 5. Modern Purchase Cycle. Adopted. (Tourism Australia, 2013, 8)

The dreaming phase in the modern cycle consists of traditional media, online, social media and retail, each containing multiple different outlets. The sources of Social Media, for example are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, (travel) blogs and many more. The planning phase consists of online, social media and retail, which again consist of their own numerous outlets. Online sources are mainly websites, for example informational websites such as Lonely Planet, or review sites such as TripAdvisor.

The booking phase in the modern cycle is, however, somewhat simple, since the options are either retail (as in the traditional cycle) or online. These outlets of course constitute many different businesses, such as OTA's, booking agencies, travel organizers, traditional travel agencies and many more. In the traditional cycle, the destination consisted of merely the product, of being on holiday. However, in the modern cycle, as one can surely guess, it consists of the product as well as online websites and social media. The modern traveller is not satisfied with the mere holiday, but they have the need to share their experience even when they are still in the process of experiencing it. Thus, the high use of social media nowadays. Finally, the post-holiday sharing in the modern cycle is not done by word-of-mouth any longer, instead through online outlets and social media (Tourism Australia, 2013, 8).

3 Web Content in Online Travel

This chapter will cover the main concept of the thesis research: web content features (of an online travel website). Since the features of a website are limitless, and with technology increasing, the focus is put on travel websites and their content.

3.1 Web content

Since the modern traveller relies on the Internet when planning or getting inspiration for travels, it is crucial that the website of a travel company is designed properly and has attractive and functional content. Approximately 80% of travellers in 2013 used the Internet as a base of planning their holiday (Google & Ipsos MediaCT, 2013, 10), which is a massive market for the tourism field.

Website content is always present on the website, and for the most part it is written content which, even today, dominates the Internet. The content of a website can be very minimal, but the bare essentials any website needs is at least a home page, about-page and contact page (Trika, 2010, 205-206, 226). The content of a website is the heart of the whole business, and it is the content which visitors are looking for, and what will draw the visitor back (Plumley, 2011, 146).

Website content features can be cut down into three main sub-categories, which are website content, website design and the combination of website content and design (Ip, Law & Lee, 2011). Since website design is mainly the layout and graphics of the website (such as the colors and fonts used on the website), the main focus will be on merely the content of websites. Since it is the content of a website that creates the website, this is what can make the business either successful or unsuccessful. A website becomes successful if its consumers are able to do the following things;

- Efficiently find and navigate to what they are searching for
- Understanding what they have found
- Acting in the hoped manner according to that understanding
- Doing this within the time and effort that the consumer is willing to spend

Thus, creating web content which works sufficiently from the consumer's point-of-view is key (Redish 2012, 20).

According to Redish (2012, 39) web content of a website includes everything that is on your website. Examples of web content include texts, illustrations and videos, different charts, forms, tables and PDF-files, blogs, podcasts, other social media, and so on.

3.1.1 Static and Dynamic Content

Web content can be divided into two broad categories of content: static and dynamic content. Depending on the type of website, the use of static and/or dynamic content will vary. In the modern day, most websites will have a majority of dynamic content, and less of static content. In the young age of the Web, static content was dominant to websites.

Static content is web content that does not alter or change. It is stored in a static web page, and always displayed the same, whenever a visitor opens the page. Static content does not use data source, such as a database, and essentially the visitor will see whatever is coded in the web page's HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). The pages can therefore include HTML tags and texts, photos, animation or other images. Examples of static content may be content with information that does not change frequently, such as return policies or store locations (Manzoor 2010, 70 & Perkins 2009, 127).

On the other hand, dynamic content is now much more used content on websites, since information and technology is constantly changing. Dynamic content is basically the opposite of static: content that is frequently changing, and may have unique content to every visitor. Dynamic content comes from a data source, assembled by back-end data sources and internal data within the website. It can include animations, videos or audio files, to name a few. The content shown to the visitor is based on a response to their request. For example, entering an order code will generate unique content of the order status to the user, according to that code. Facebook is also a good example of dynamic content; each user has a different home page according to their personal information and contacts, although the address in the web browser is the same to every user (Manzoor 2010, 71 & Perking 2009, 127-128).

3.1.2 Responsive Web Design

Due to the reality of the majority of people having more than one device at hand, companies have evolved to modify their websites onto these different devices. That is where responsive web design comes into play; a design and development of websites based on the screen size, platform and orientation of the device. If the company has designed this responsive web, the user should automatically be moved to the "mobile version" of the

website, when on their iPhone, for example. This means, that the technology will have the ability to respond to the user's preferences.

The responsive web design should be built so, that it is automatically able to adjust, without requiring countless custom-made solutions for each type of user. Some features which are a major part of responsive web design, are screen resolution, flexible images, layout structure and showing or hiding content based on the device being used. Screen resolution consists of planning the screen size, and although the different screen sizes of devices nowadays are endless, it may be wise to choose the most used ones. Screen resolution also includes designing the website for landscape and portrait, and having these switch easily upon page load.

Having the use of flexible images enables the website to showcase the same images nicely on different sized electronic devices, without the image going over the "borders" of the device, or staying too small. As said earlier, the design will enable the device to adapt to the consumer preferences. Layout may be a bigger challenge, due to screen size. Many websites opt to change the layout completely, in order to simplify the website for mobile devices versus a laptop, for example.

Lastly, since the size determines how much information and content is possible to show on one page, choosing to leave something out for a smaller device may be a smart choice. If a small electronic device were to have as much content on one page as the official webpages, it may seem very small, cluttered and poorly accessible. Therefore, the design needs to determine which content to keep, and which content to leave out for those smaller devices (Knight 2011).

3.2 Travel Website Content

Web content on travel websites are crucial to the business, since the content defines the products and services available, and either makes the customer experience pleasant, or in the worst case, unfortunate. Although the web content on travel sites is fairly similar to other businesses' website content, the travel sector has some content which is very common for most travel websites. For clarity and structural reasons, the author has created a model based on the web content information found, consisting of four categories, into which content features have been placed. The model can be seen below in Table 1, with the categories of visual, informational, practical and social content and the content features of each category.

Social Content	Informational Content	Practical Content	Social Content
Photos	Informational text of destination	Categorizing destination according to type of holiday	Customer reviews and customer scores
Videos	Weather information of destination	Comparing results of same criteria on same webpage	Personal holiday account
Integrated Maps	Examples of holiday packages	Language settings	Blog
Visible Logos	About Us-page	Price-alert function	E-newsletter
	Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)	Search within website	Live chat
		Currency settings	Social Media

Table 1. Web Content Model by category.

3.2.1 Visual content

When companies communicate their idea or product, visual material is a great aid, and can make words feel outdated. As it has been said for a long time; a picture is worth a thousand words. The importance of visual content can be seen in the use of consumers. Users of Instagram, where photos overrule words, upload an astounding 4,5 million photos only on iPhone. The importance of this change in consumer behavior, shifting from words to visual, must be addressed by brands, which must learn to visually engage with their evolving consumers (Allen, Lamp & Woodward 2012).

Using visual content on a website is also a great marketing tool. Incorporating visual content, such as photos or videos, with more informational content, such as various texts, can be fully engaging to the visitor, and can also differentiate the website, as well give a competitive stand-point. This is why many of the larger and successful businesses use visual content on their websites, to add onto the brand, and improve marketing (Swift 2013, 40).

The major visual content features of travel websites, explained in more detail below, are

- Photos
- Videos
- Integrated maps
- Visible logos

Photos are a major visual content, to which the consumer directs their attention once entering the website. The quality of photos can pan out the success of the website design. Having the right photos, and of good quality creates credibility, have a positive first impression and have a positive outcome on the website effectiveness. Therefore, having good quality photos and videos, which are of relevance can set a huge advantage to the website (Reynolds, 2011). Atkinson (58, 2013) adds that having real photos of the staff behind the website makes the website stand out from the rest. Using stock photos, which can be found on various other websites, is boring and very common. He adds, that original photos outperform stock photos by 35%.

A step forward from photos is moving photos: **videos**. It is estimated that approximately 50% of Internet traffic is due based solely on online videos. Videos are a great way to add to the website, for the purpose of creating an atmosphere of a destination, for example. A few benefits of having videos on a website are:

- Showing the personality of the business, without meeting face-to-face
- Can optimize the website's ranking for search engines
- Visitors tend to watch a video versus reading text
- A great tool for differentiation
- Videos are easier for mobile user, instead of reading texts

(Luke 2013, 18).

According to Shelly & Vermaat (2011, 173) most Internet users find reliability and massive convenience in having the possibility of **integrated maps** online, such as Google Maps or Bing Maps. In the travel sector, the visualization of distances from the hotel is simply shown on the integrated map, for the convenience of the user. This could also easily be categorized as a practical web content feature, however, in the travel websites the visualization of the locations are key, which places this in the visual content.

Having a visible and clear **logo** of the company on the website is essential in building reliability from the consumer's eyes, and it also pushes the consumer into relating to the company. Having visual logos is a great part of the website branding as well, which additionally radiates the empathy of the user towards the company (Borovicka & Stockdale, 7).

3.2.2 Informational content

Informational content can also be defined as value-added content. This type of content is information on the website which is relative, informative and timely. The informational content must also be accurate and high in quality, as well as of use to the online user. It is crucial to narrow down the informational content, in order to add value to the website's purpose, instead of merely adding volume. It is also advised to create original informative content, instead of using existing content, when it comes to written content (Campbell & Shelly 2012, 79).

According to Sklar (2012, 67) the informative content is the most important content of the website, it is what users come to search for. Therefore, having easy access to the information they are seeking is important. Users often come to the website to find specific data, such as contact information or files. They may also look for less-important informational content, such as the weather averages or "About Us" page on travel websites.

Informational web content features, which will be explained in this section of the thesis, are

- Informational text of destination
- Weather information of destination
- Examples of holiday packages
- About us-page
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Informational text of the prospective holiday destination is one of the main reasons for a user to visit the website. A text describing information of the destination, top attractions and useful tips is information, which commonly affects the consumer as to what destination they will choose. Writing on the web is much different than reading the same information from a travel magazine or printed guide. Since the modern web user is busy and multi-tasking, the descriptions of texts need to be short and to the point. However, it is also important to use descriptive words, adjectives, since these words will then affect the search engine optimization, and attract more users based on their word search. This means, that creating an atmosphere of the destination with descriptive words will help the consumer to decide, but will also increase the amount of visitors to the website (Felder 2012, 13; Redish 2012, 74).

Searching for **weather** information of the prospective holiday destination is a huge part of a traveller's planning phase. It may be before the destination has been chose (what is the

optimal destination to go according to weather, at a certain time) or just before leaving on the holiday (what should be packed according to the current weather). There are multiple different websites with merely weather-related content, but also official tourism websites commonly have weather information, and holiday websites often offer at least “weather averages” of the destination. The information of weather is important to the traveller, since it has a huge impact on the holiday, what can be done, what to pack, and what to avoid (Cabinet Maker 2004, 14).

Most travel websites include **holiday packages**, or examples of holiday packages on their websites. According to the 2008 European Travel Report (13-14, 2008), at the time, the online travel package sector was having a healthy growth, with Germans being the major consumer of these holiday packages. Smith (2013) seems to have a similar thought on this sector; finding holiday packages online is very simple, and the holiday package itself is commonly convenient, money saving and favorable to the traveller.

The “**About (Us)**” page is an essential part of any website content. It showcases the people or company behind the webpages. It gives more information about the company, to those visitors wishing to know more. The “About” page may include:

- Introducing the people behind the business, or the team
- History of the business (when it was established, the story behind establishing)
- Photographs of the employees, or other photos of interest
- Adding a ‘human touch’, perhaps humor, to make a friendly connection to the user (Moore 2013, 26).

According to Bell (2013, 86), having **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)** as a content on the website, will enable the user for efficient information search, letting the user find the relative information of a question in a quick and organized manner. FAQ’s should include common questions the user may have about the website content or the purpose of the website. Visitors will frequently ask questions about the services or products. The FAQ’s should be up-to-date and revised on a regular basis.

3.2.3 Practical content

Practical content, or also known as usable content or functional content, is what makes the visitor’s experience efficient and easy. It may include features which ease the visitor’s experience, and simultaneously making the functions on the website practical for the use of the visitor. Having ad-ons or creating the web template to be simple enough and effi-

cient are both a part of practical content. Organizing the website in favor of the user is also of essence. Other features, which make the user experience possible, are a search feature or language settings, so the visitor can understand the content (Theriault 2013, online).

In this section of the thesis, six different practical content features will be explained, of which two features are USP's to TripAhead's functions. The features in this section include the following

- Categorizing destinations according to type of holiday
- Comparing results of same criteria on same webpage
- Language settings
- Price alert function
- Search within website
- Currency settings

Unique to TripAhead's content, and one of their Unique Selling Points, the visitor has the possibility to **categorize different destinations** according to the type of holiday. Holiday may be categorized according to merely one type of holiday, or several combined. For example, a visitor may want to see all destinations, which are city-destinations. Another visitor may want more specified criteria, such as combining city, beach and romance, thus resulting in destinations, which offer all three types. Another practical content feature, which is unique to the concept of TripAhead is being able to **compare different destinations**, of same criteria, on the same web page. Commonly, OTAs compare results of same criteria of the same destination, however TripAhead enables comparing multiple different destinations. Criteria used can be, for example, budget, flight length, hotel class etc. (Manninen 26 October 2014).

Depending on the target market, many OTAs need **language settings** for their website. Commonly, English is one of the must-have languages of a website, since it is universal. In addition to this, the website should have the major languages of their biggest clientele. Without complete understanding of the text, policies and reservation system, the visitor will most likely opt to leave the site without a purchase. Therefore, it is important to understand what the visitor wants and needs from the website, so that they can understand. An example of this can be seen from Google, who have translated their Gmail service into 71 different languages, to make it a personal and practical experience for the user (Weiss 2014, 2).

Price alert services are the next step to personal accounts. The user saves their preferred holidays onto their account, and whenever the price increases or decreases, the user is notified of it. This way, the user can easily track the price, without the extra effort of checking online every day to see if the price has gone down. Not only is it a useful and practical feature to the user, it may increase early sales, as well as increased sales in general (Travel Trade Gazette UK & Ireland 2014, 9).

A **search feature** within the website, is commonly on the homepage of the website. It is a great and practical tool for the user, which searches the specific webpages according to the search words written into the text box. It is a great and practical tool to have on the website, because it enables the user to search for specific information within the website, and to acquire the information in a quick and efficient manner. It is very uncommon to find a website without a search feature (Campbell 2015, 77).

Converting prices into the user's own currency, will ease the purchasing experience for the user. Without a built-in **currency converter** on the website, the user will need to search this data on a separate webpage, going through a time-consuming process. With traditional online currency converters, the user needs to open the link, search the correct currencies, and type in the amount they wish to convert. With a built-in currency application, the user needs to choose the desired currency, and then all the prices will be automatically shown in their own currency. This makes the user experience efficient and simple (Pugh 2010, 76).

3.2.4 Social and interactive content

Social media and social networking has become the dominant way of connecting on the Internet, changing the way millions of web users interact with each other. Enabling social content on a website is crucial to the user, but helpful to the business as well. Content providers can easily track the most popular or relevant information through their social media, and build up and improve their website or business based on users (Golbleck 2013, 4). However, according to Porter (2010, 129), in order for social content to remain interesting and relevant to the user, the social content needs constant change and updates. The social content needs to have fresh information and updates, while regulating the flow of new content carefully—too much content in a short period of time will limit the attention span of the user.

Social networking is the means of building online communities of people/users with similar interests and activities. This may include the ability to browse, share reviews, texts, photos, blog posts, events, promotions, music, videos and so on. Social networking has been seen increasing in the online travel sector, with an 88% of leisure travellers being affected by online reviews of travel related services or products (Bilgihan, Erdem, Nusair & Okumus 2012, 207-208).

Additionally, the Social Web allows information to be found by consumers more efficiently than ever before. Websites can deliver relevant information based on voting or collective averaging methods. These methods will mark out the most popular posts, media, photos etc. of users, and the website can fully take advantage of this. Users also rely on each other for information and reliable reviews, so having a hold of these interactive content features are also an advantage to the website, as long as the reviews are optimistic (Chi 2008, 88).

Although websites nowadays have multiple different content features within the social and interactive category, the major web features of travel websites will be explained. These include the following

- Customer reviews and customer scores
- Personal holiday account
- Blog
- E-newsletter
- Live chat
- Social media

It is widely known that consumers tend to rely on **customer reviews**, and **customer scores**, bypassing marketing techniques and company brands. The reason behind this is, is that customer scores and reviews and the information collected from these do not originate from the company, therefore having negative reviews is also possible. Therefore, consumers often opt for their fellow travellers' reviews instead of relying on the brand of the company (Carson, Ho-Dac & Moore 2013, 37). In their research, Mudambi and Schuff (2010, 185-197) found that moderate reviews were more helpful to other users, versus extreme good or bad reviews. In addition to this, they noted that consumers found longer reviews, with more detail to be of more use to consumers, than shorter ones.

The use of personal **user accounts** on websites is considered a safety-risk to the modern Internet user, since accounts are easily hacked. However, creating a personal holiday account has minimal risk, since no personal information or credit card information needs

to be shared. The purpose of a travel or holiday account is to track activity within the travel website, being able to write reviews and personal comments, saving personal holiday data. This way, the customer is able to save their preferred holiday packages, information or destinations, and they are easily accessed upon return to the website. According to Friedland and Hauff (2012), users have a need to share and save information that is important to them. Additionally, users commonly already have different existing accounts within social media; therefore combining these accounts may be the best and easiest way, for example, signing into the travel account through the user's Facebook account.

Many companies, as well as websites, now have weekly or monthly newsletters with information about news, updates and promotions. The newsletters in online travel, **e-newsletters**, are commonly subscribed to by users of the website, in order to receive new ideas for travel, inspiration and promotions on holiday packages or new destinations. An e-newsletter is easily produced and sent to subscribers' e-mail, and it works as a great marketing tool as well. Keeping track of how the subscribers respond to the e-newsletter, as well as frequent updates is crucial for the use of this feature. An e-newsletter, to which the user subscribes themselves to, helps to find travellers who are actually interested in receiving the newsletter, instead of treating it as spam (Jackson 2013, 201). According to Travel Weekly's 2013 Travel Industry Survey (2013, T4) users considered the importance of e-mail updates about special offers to be up at 54%, which was the third most important service of travel operators.

Blogs, although not specifically a part of the website itself, are a fully different means of online communication. Blogs are commonly simplified posts of web postings, and they share several certain characteristics:

- They are often personal, emphasizing the author's point-of-view, whatever the topic. In travel, these may be topics such as the "best" places to travel, what makes flying easier etc., all topics which are informational, but commonly based on the author's opinion.
- They are updated frequently, with an emphasis on spontaneous and free-willing communication versus the time and effort spent in creating communication on web pages.
- They are flexible in the way that all posts are equally valued, be it a few sentences or an entire array of texts. For example, readers may equally enjoy browsing a post with mainly photos of a destination versus reading a thoughtful and longer post on the ethics of travel.
- They form a larger community and broader conversation, meaning a blog post may have replies, shares, comments etc. on a specific topic, and it makes the commu-

nity interactive. This may also lead to more users of the web pages the blog is supported by.

Many companies have opted for blog use, with high-positioned managers, programmers or designers as authors, to make the company seem friendlier and easily approachable (MacDonald 2011, 350-351).

Real-time chat, or also known as live chat, is an interactive content tool used for interactivity between the website or company and the user. A live chat allows the customer to ask questions he or she is having, in real-time using text, voice or video. The visitor commonly initiates the chat, and the informant can be someone from within the company, or outsourced (Campbell 2012, 168). In cases such as TripAhead, this may be too task-oriented and costly, due to live chats being open 24/7, but larger companies such as Aurinkomatkat are currently using this feature.

One of the most recent and growing web content is **social media**. This interactive tool is a great marketing technique and getting a personal touch to the users. According to Albarran (2013, 2) social media has multiples of definitions, from different perspectives, however the definition used in this thesis will be from the perspective of the companies using social media. Therefore, social media is the different technologies or applications a company uses to develop their social network, and this consists of posting multimedia information (photos, videos, audio etc.), location-based services, gaming and many others.

As of January 2015, the five leading social media networks used worldwide (and omitting personal chat-applications), are Facebook, QZone, Google+, Instagram and Twitter (Statista 2015, online). These five sources of social media have altogether over 1.5 billion active users worldwide, which is a massive market that companies should take advantage of in their businesses.

When it comes to social media for travel operators, 29% said the goal of using social media was to raise awareness and give attention to promotions, 20% of respondents said to generate new business and expand the customer base, but 24% were yet unaware of their goals, and were still in the process of taking up social media as a way of connecting with customers. This goes to show how recent social media is, how important it is becoming, and that companies need to start making plans about their use of social media (Travel Weekly 2013, T12).

4 Research Implementation

The focus of this chapter is to explain the process of conducting the research for the purpose of the thesis. It will cover main subjects such as objectives of the research, research methodology, research questions and distribution, data collection as well as a brief time schedule of the process of the research done. This will be the basis of the actual research done, and based on this, the outcomes and analysis can be completed.

4.1 Objectives

The starting point to the research for the thesis is based on the lacking of previous research done by the commissioning company. TripAhead has not, as of now, conducted any studies with potential consumers as their respondents, to get an insight as to what they personally prefer. Therefore, the research would point out the habits and opinions of travellers, who use the Internet, for TripAhead to benefit from.

The main objective of the research is to explore if there are certain web content features on travel websites that users find more important than others, when it comes to planning and booking a holiday online. The idea for the case came from co-operation between the author and the commissioning party, in which they discussed several aspects that the company could benefit from. After a few meetings, both parties decided to narrow down the topic to the web content of the travel organizer, and to find out how customers see it, and what they deem important.

Additionally, the objectives of the research will also scope out what type of web content the respondents find the most attractive on travel websites. The type of web content included in the research is visual, informational, practical as well as social. The results obtained from this will help TripAhead pursue their website in means of consumer preferences.

Furthermore, the research will identify the preferences of online travellers, and can benefit both the companies and visitors, as to how they should arrange their websites. It will identify the most important web content of the visitor, thus the company will be able to alter the website according to the consumer needs.

4.2 Method: Online Survey

The method of research chosen for the survey is quantitative research method, in which collected data are numerical, and the analyzed data will result in numerical answers using mathematical methods (Mujis 2011, 1). The answers would be analyzed using mathematical functions, and the conclusions and suggestions would be based mainly on numbers collected from the overall data. However, qualitative research method has also been incorporated into the research, in the open question within the survey, enabling respondents to answer their personal opinions. Therefore, the research method is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, although the focus is on the quantitative research method.

Since the commissioning party of the thesis is an online-based travel organizer, the author thought best to collect research data in the form of an online survey. The author did briefly consider qualitative research by means of physical interviews with clients, however this was an impossible task due to the recent launching of the company. At that time, the company had had only one purchasing customer, thus getting varied answers of several consumers was impossible. Therefore, the concentration was put into the online survey. In addition to this, Mujis (2011) adds that the benefits of conducting an online survey versus a pen-on-paper survey, is saving time of data input since the online survey automatically saves the data. The online survey, versus a traditional paper survey, would be a great tool to collect data from the users of the Internet.

It was decided with the company co-founder Krista Manninen, that the survey would not only be limited to the target market of the company, and that answers from outside the target market would be considered as equal. The reason behind this decision was the need for over 100 survey answers, and the possibility of the company expanding in the future to a wider target market, thus taking advantage of international, varying answers. Additionally, at the time of making the survey, TripAhead had no show of their current target market succeeding, and a more general audience was decided upon. Therefore, the only two criteria for answering the survey were: 1. Respondent uses the Internet and 2. Respondent travels at least once a year, on average.

The final version of the exact survey questions went through ongoing changes, minor and major, with the co-operation and help of Krista Manninen, the co-founder of the commissioning company TripAhead, as well as critical and professional advice given by the thesis supervisor Tommi Immonen.

4.3 Survey questions and proceedings

The online survey was conducted by dividing the survey into two main categories. The first category was based on general questions to the traveller. The first category covered basic demographics and geographic questions, as well as travelling habits of the survey answerers.

Questions of the first section consisted of factors such as nationality, age and sex, as well as simple questions about travelling habits, such as travel budget, how often respondents travel and the websites used for planning holidays online. The questions included in the basic category of the survey amounted to a total of six questions.

Instead of only having a survey about preferred web content, the author added this first section to determine the type of traveller, and consumer habits the respondents have. This will enable to analyze the second section of the survey in a better manner, with more reliable and efficient data as to *who* the user of these websites really is, and what do they prefer. Otherwise the collected data of preferred web content may be unreliable, since no background information of the respondent would exist.

The second category focused primarily on the different website content features, and their importance to the user. From the features explained in section 3.1, only a few from each category (visual, informational, practical and social) were chosen. The features chosen were discussed with co-founder Krista Manninen, as to what the commissioning party found of importance to their company concept. Thus, five general questions to preferred web content were created. Four questions were focused on the different web content (visual, informational, practical and social), each having three content features that were to be ranked by importance. The fifth question was to rank four content features by importance, categorizing the most important to the least important. Lastly, an open question as to what the user prefers when planning and booking a holiday was asked. The last question was decided to be an optional question, from which there could be a possibility to gain more insight into the user preferences of website content.

Since the distribution channels for the online survey varied, and the reached respondents would be international, an English survey was conducted. However, in addition to an English survey, a Finnish survey was conducted as well, to ease those Finnish respondents (which were predicted to be the majority). The author then created the online survey by using the Webropol online survey tool.

4.4 Distribution of the survey

The focus of the distribution channels was varied, with hopes of getting different types of travellers as respondents. Channels included TripAhead's official channels, as well as external channels on social media and travel forums. The author and the commissioning company decided the chosen distribution channels together. Upon discussion with the company co-founder, the following channels were decided for the online survey distribution.

1. TripAhead's official Facebook-page, which at the time had 98 likes.
2. TripAhead's blog (blog.tripahead.com), which has gotten increased viewers, as well as followers.
3. TripAhead's Twitter account.
4. Pallontallaajat travel forum. The permission for posting the survey onto this website was accepted by the administrator.
5. Tripadvisor travel forum, into the category "off-topic chatter" since the intention of posting an online survey in a travel forum did not seem to fit into other categories, and the forum guidelines were more strict. (Contact information for the forum was nonexistent, so permission for posting the survey could not be asked from the administrators.)
6. The author's personal Facebook-account.

The online surveys were placed once into each channel, and the results were monitored daily by the author. The goal was to acquire a minimum of 100 reliable and fully answered surveys from users of different backgrounds (taking into consideration that the last question is optional). The minimum number of respondents for a reliable outcome was chosen, due to the author's limited timeframe and schedule during the process of creating, collecting and analyzing the research results.

The attachments of the online survey questions, in English and in Finnish, can be found in the appendices part of this thesis.

4.5 Time Schedule

The time schedule proved to be the biggest limitation and challenge for the thesis and the author. At the time of starting to create the research for the thesis, the author had a limited time of less than two months to conduct, collect, analyze and complete the thesis results. Therefore, a sufficient time schedule was put into action.

The author needed to get a minimum of 100 answers from six distribution channels in total, and therefore the time limit for collecting the data was placed at 10 days. The estimated number of respondents was predicted to be between 100-150 within those 10 days.

The two online surveys were created on 18th January 2015, and distributed to the channels the following day on Monday 19th January 2015. The distribution advanced throughout the day, placing the surveys onto different channels during different times of the day. The time period of ten days was from 19th January 2015 to 28th January 2015. If the survey hadn't gotten enough respondents within that time period, the period would be extended by another week. However, the author managed to receive 108 responses of the online surveys within those ten days, and this was considered sufficient.

5 Research Analysis and Outcomes

The results of the online survey will be explained in this chapter of the thesis, dividing the outcomes into sections of demographics, travel habits, preferred web content and finally an additional chapter about the results of the optional open question.

The author was to receive a minimum of 100 responses to the online survey within the planned timeframe, and the end result was a total of 108 responses. The responses were divided into the two surveys, the English survey totaling 78 respondents, and the Finnish survey totaling 30 respondents. The amount was deemed sufficient, and the author then began to analyze the answers as a whole, as well as question-by-question. The answers from the English and Finnish surveys were combined, and not analyzed as a separate set of respondents. In addition, all 108 of respondents were valid respondents, since they answered all the mandatory questions in the survey.

5.1 Demographics

The analysis of the demographics includes the first three questions of the survey: nationality, gender and age. This would give a brief understanding of the respondents' demographics, to see what the average age group is, are the majority of respondent male or female, and what are the largest nationalities that answered the survey. This will then give some insight into the results of the next two sections.

Nationality

Seen in Figure 10 (below) are the respondents' nationalities, of which a total of 14 different nationalities were recorded among the 108 respondents. As can be clearly seen, the majority of respondents had Finnish nationality, totaling to 56 respondents, meaning 51,9% of the total were Finns. The two second largest categories were Swedish, with 23 respondents (21,3%) and Chinese with 13 respondents (12%). Besides these three main nationalities of respondents, other nationalities (with more than 1 respondent) were British, British/Finnish, Russian and Canadian, most of these having 2-3 respondents. The "other" nationalities are a combination of nationalities that had only one respondent per nationality. These nationalities include the following: United States, Nepal, Vietnam, Japan, Spain, Czech Republic and Netherlands.

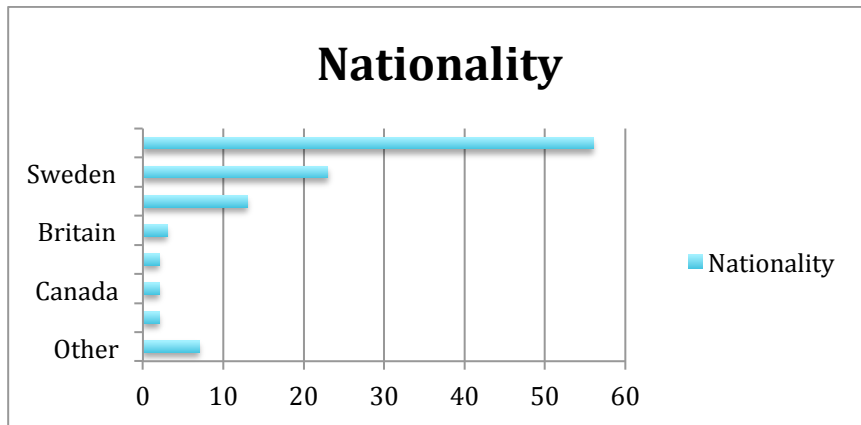


Figure 10. Respondents' nationalities.

The results of the nationalities were a bit surprising, since a larger percentage of Finnish respondents were expected, and the number of Chinese respondents was surprisingly large. However, this may be explained by the numerous Chinese acquaintances of the author on her Facebook page.

Age

The age of the respondents (seen in Figure 11) was expected to be rather young, since the distribution channels were primarily social media, as well as travel forums. Possibly the older respondents found the survey from the travel forums. Therefore, the results of the age came as no surprise.

51 respondents were in the first age category of 18 to 24, which equaled 47,2% of the total. The second largest age group was 25 to 34 years old, with 33 respondents (30,5%). The smaller age groups were the oldest three categories: 35-44 years old gathered 11 respondents (10,2%), 45-54 years old gathered 10 respondents (9,3%) and over 55 years old gathered 3 respondents (2,8%). Therefore, the majority of respondents were fairly young travellers, aged between 18 to 34 years of age. This is most likely a realistic statistic, since the younger generation uses the Internet more than the older generation.

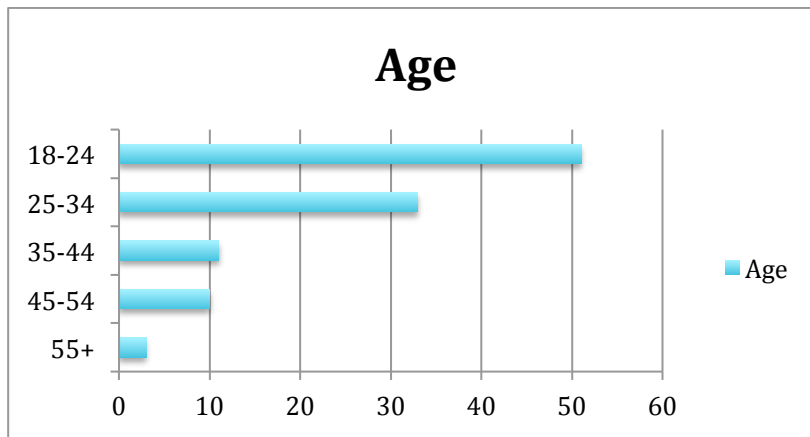


Figure 11. Respondents' age.

Gender

The gender was predicted to be fairly even between male and female; however, the results showed that there were more female respondents than male respondents.

The total of female respondents was 68, which amounts to 63% of the total, while the total of male respondents reached only 40, which equals a 37% of the total. This means that the majority of female respondents were over 25% more than the male respondents.

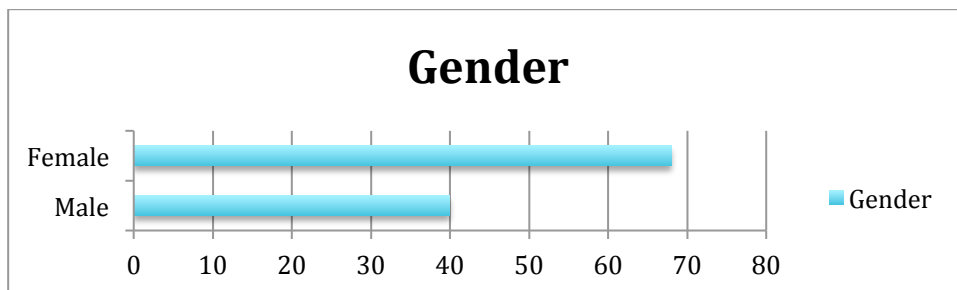


Figure 12. Respondents' gender.

From the first three questions of the survey, the research found out the demographics of the average respondent. Based on the results of these three categories of nationality, age and gender, the average respondent was:

1. Finnish
2. 18-24 years of age
3. Female.

5.2 Travel habits

The online survey asked the respondents three questions relating to their travel habits. The first question determined how often the respondent travels, "How many times do you travel per year?" The second question determined their willingness to pay, "How much are you willing to spend on hotel and flights of a holiday?" Finally, the third question explored the respondent's planning habits, by asking which of the mentioned websites they use when planning a holiday. The reason behind these three questions was to determine the reality of consumer habits. TripAhead has identified that the current traveller spends lots of time researching on multiple websites to find information about the destination, prices, booking etc. However, no previous research was done to confirm that this statement is correct, and therefore it was included into the online survey.

Travel times per year

The results for the travel times per year were mainly expected to be similar to what the results of the real responses gave. The majority of respondents travel once or twice each year, totaling in 51 responses for the first option of "1-2 times", which gives a majority of 47,2% of the total. The second largest group was the next option, "3-4 times" with 39 responses, equaling to 36,1%.

The smaller groups were "5-6 times" and "7 times or more", however these two alternatives received more answers than was expected. The great number of travel times per year could possibly be explained by business trips, however, this is not known because it was not a deciding factor on the survey. The choice "5-6 times" received 11 responses (10,2%) and the choice "7 times or more" got 7 responses (6,5%).

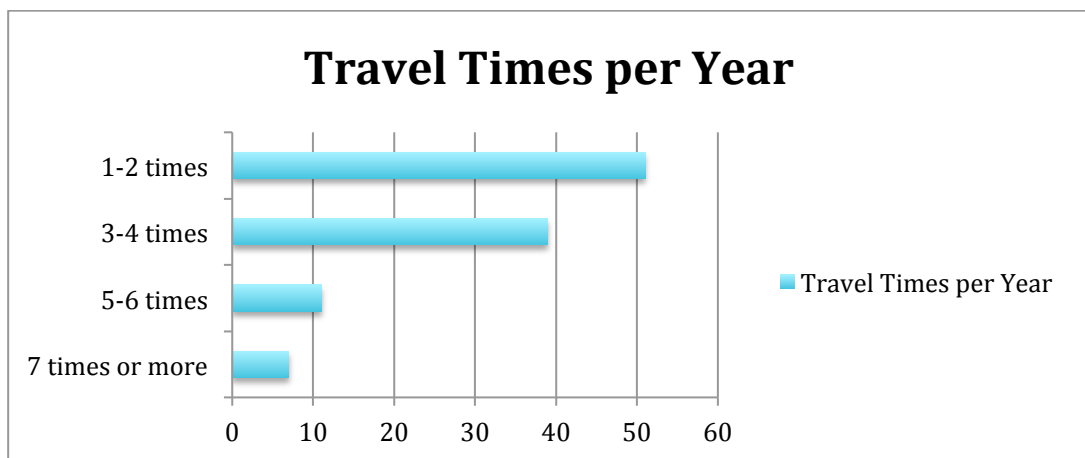


Figure 12. Travel times per Year.

Amount of money willing to spend

The results of the respondents' willingness to spend money, was quite even throughout all the options. The lowest amount of respondents was in the first choice of "under 300€", and this shows that the travellers who answered the survey are not too shy on spending money. They are willing to spend realistic amounts of money on their holiday, or they are willing to spend more than the minimum requirement. Nevertheless, travelling on a low and minimum budget is not really an issue for the respondents. Surprising was to see the large amount of respondents that answered the last and highest option "over 700€".

The majority of respondents answered "300-500€", with a total of 36 responses (33,3%). The second largest groups were "501-600€" with 29 responses (26,9%) and "over 700€" with 27 responses (25%). The lowest responses were for the options "601-700€" with 10 responses (9,3%) and "under 300€" with only 6 responses (5,5%).

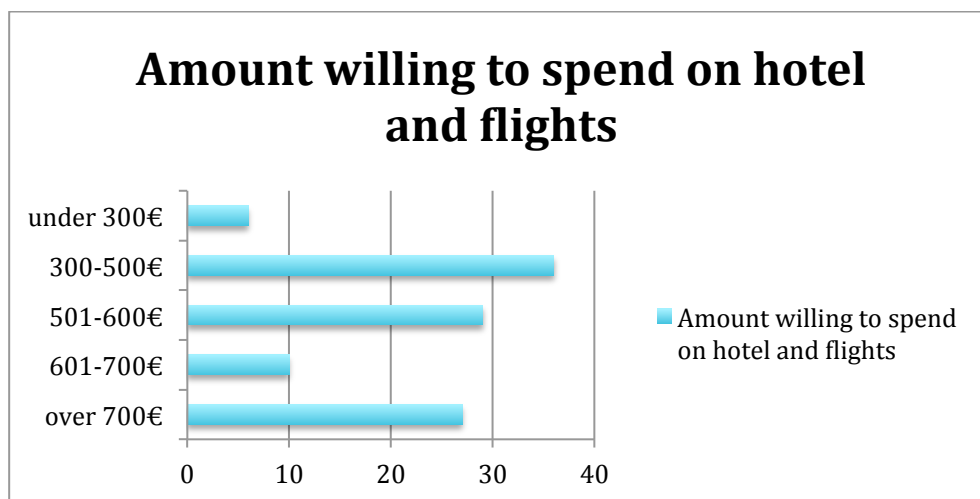


Figure 13. Amount willing to spend on hotel and flights.

Websites used

The respondent was given a question asking which websites they use in the process of planning their holiday, and were to select all the of the options that apply. There was not one single option that received a vote from all 108 respondents, which means that each traveller is unique and has their own way of planning a holiday. However, the three top options that stood out were hotel websites, flight websites and search engines. It was surprising to see that only 82 respondents (76%) of the total 108 use search engines as a

way to search for information regarding their holiday. This may be because some travellers have certain websites that they use, and they automatically go to the website.

Hotel websites had the highest amount of users, with 85 responses (78,7% of all respondents). The two second most-used websites are flight websites and search engines, both acquiring a total of 82 responses, which amounts to 76% of all respondents. The least used websites by the respondents were OTAs (54 answers, 50% of all respondents) and informational websites (50 answers, 46,3% of all respondents).

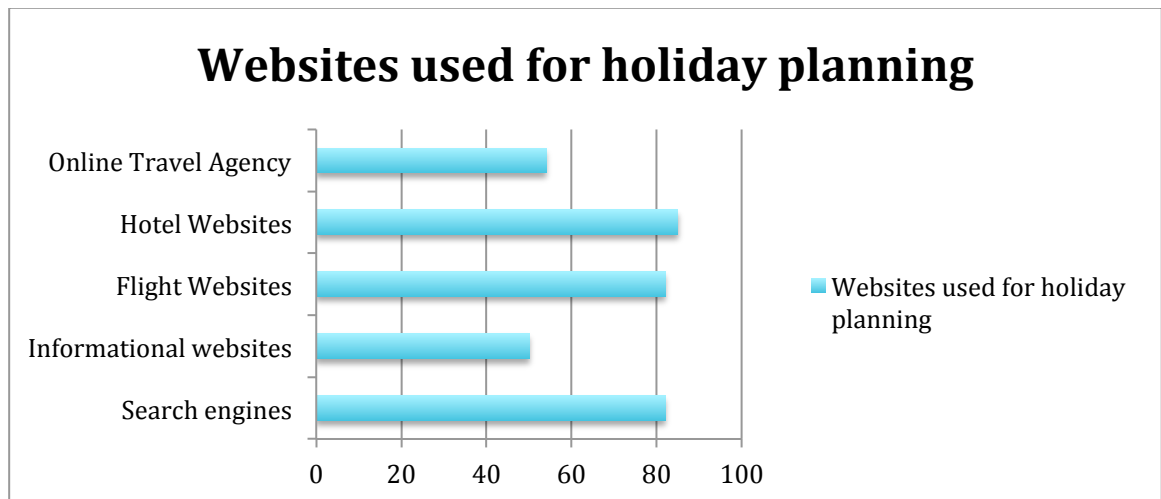


Figure 14. Websites used for holiday planning.

Overall, it is safe to say that the use of different types, and multiple websites during the planning phase of a holiday is quite high. Travellers seem to spend time by browsing several different websites, and only 50% head to the websites of OTAs, where they could get most of the information offered by the separate websites.

5.3 Age versus travel habits

To get more insight to the travelling habits of the respondents of this online survey, the author has cross-analyzed some data. First, the author divided the respondents into two main categories, merely based on their age. The reason behind this is that age can easily define spending habits, time and willingness to travel, as well as the knowledge and preference of using the Internet as a main source of planning. The two categories were divided with the following criteria:

Category 1: Aged 18-24, 25-34.

Category 2: Aged 35-44, 45-55, and 55+.

So how does the age affect the travel habits?

When referenced with the amount of travel per year, the results between the two categories were varying, as expected. In general, the respondents chose options fairly uniquely, with percentages of each option varying. By looking at Table 1, there are slight differences between the answers of Category 1 and Category 2 respondents. Category 1 respondents had the majority of their answers in the first two options of “1-2 times” and “3-4 times”. However, with Category 2, the answers were more widely spread out for the options, the majority in the first two options, but option “7 times or more” not too far behind with nearly 17% of the respondents.

How many times do you travel per year?	Category 1 respondents	Category 2 respondents
1-2 times	46,7%	36,8%
3-4 times	36,3%	33,6%
5-6 times	8,2%	13%
7 times or more	8,8%	16,8%

Table 2. Travel times per year in %, by category of age.

From this information, the general conclusion that can be drawn is that Category 2 respondents (more mature travellers) do travel more per year on average compared to the “younger” travellers in Category 1.

Next, the two mentioned categories were cross-referenced with the monetary aspect of the questionnaire; how much they are willing to spend on hotel and flights of a holiday.

The results of Table 2 show that respondents of Category 1 answered quite evenly throughout the five different options. The majority of respondents are willing to spend between 300 to 500 euros on their holidays, however a quarter were willing to spend over 700. This may mean that the younger respondents prefer either cheaper holidays, or are willing to spend more on their holiday experience, perhaps to further destinations. Comparing the results of Category 2 respondents, the older respondents are willing to spend money on their holidays, with over 50% choosing the “over 700€” option. The other 4 options were chosen very evenly among the minority of respondents.

How much are you willing to spend on hotel and flights?	Category 1 respondents	Category 2 respondents
Under 300€	3%	8,4%
300-500€	35,6%	12,9%
501-600€	30,4%	12,9%
601-700€	8,2%	9,1%
Over 700€	22,8%	56,7%

Table 3. Amount willing to spend on hotel and flights in %, by category of age.

Finally, the age categories were compared to their habits on the Internet when planning their holidays. Table 3 shows that Category 1 respondents use multiple websites quite evenly, with the exception of informational websites and OTA (less than 50% of users). However, the respondents in Category 2 have more clear results, with nearly all of them using OTAs, and over 50% of respondents using the other websites as well. This may be a result of the technology advance during the younger generation, therefore they tend to search for information on their own, whilst the older generation relies more on all-in-one websites such as travel agencies.

What websites do you use when planning your holiday?	Category 1 respondents	Category 2 respondents
Search engines	81,4%	69,6%
Informational websites	47,4%	52,8%
Flight websites	76,3%	75,5%
Hotel websites	79,3%	83,2%
Online Travel Agencies	45,8%	90,9%

Table 4. Websites used when planning holiday in %, by category of age.

5.4 Preferred web content

The main purpose of the thesis results are from the four questions about the preferred web content, which will be analyzed in this section. The four sections were divided by type of content; visual, informational, practical and social, and each category of web content had three features that represent the type of web content. In this way the results could be

analyzed by type of web content preferred, as well as individual web content features, which gained the most importance.

Question number 11 was disqualified from the analysis due to misunderstanding of the question. Respondents were to rank the four options by importance, number 1 being most important and number 4 being least. However, many respondents commented that they were not able to choose multiple answers for each section, as well as many commenting that they had accidentally marked number 4 as most important. This was most likely a flaw in the design of the question, and the results would not be reliable. Therefore, the question would be disqualified. However, similar results can be analyzed from questions 7-10, from the average points gotten of each category.

The ranking system will be from 1 to 4, due to the options given to the respondent (not important, very little importance, somewhat important and very important). Number 1 is the lowest score, and number 4 is the highest. Therefore, the higher the score, the more important the web content is to the respondents. Visual web content included the features photos, videos and integrated maps. Informational web content included informational text and tips of destination, weather information of destination and examples of holiday packages. Practical web content included different currencies, being able to categorize destinations according to type of holiday and being able to compare same criteria destinations on one page. Therefore, the three features in each type of web content resulted in the average score for each category.

The results of these scores, seen in Table 4, are relatively even throughout the four different types of web content, all of the scores below 3. The highest score received was the average of the informational web content with a score of 2,9. Close behind that was visual web content with a score of 2,87. Practical and social web content were not as important to the respondents, with scores of 2,42 and 2,41 respectively. Based on these results, the respondents find that informational and visual web content to be the most important when planning and buying holidays online. Practical and social web content have less of an importance, however, they do still remain rather important in the decision-making process.

Type of web content	Average score (1-4)
VISUAL	2,87
INFORMATIONAL	2,9
PRACTICAL	2,42
SOCIAL	2,41

Table 5. Web content scores.

When analyzing the results of the 12 web content features individually, the results were a bit different than from Table 4 (below). As individual web content features, the results were quite varying between the scores received from respondents. The most important feature according to respondent opinions is user reviews and comments, scoring 3.59 out of 4. Not far behind is informational texts and tips with a score of 3.55. From these two results, it can be assumed that travellers nowadays rely heavily on other travellers' opinions, experiences and advice. After this research in the planning phase has been done, the traveller moves onto the informational texts provided by the companies. Perhaps the user compares the two to see that the information received from both ends aligns.

The next two important features are photos (scoring 3.41) and integrated maps (scoring 3.11), both from the visual web content category. After these two, the scores dropped under 3, which can be seen as of little importance. The only feature which scored under 2, is live chat, which may mean that travellers prefer to do their research, planning and booking on their own terms and time. They may not need the help of professionals as much, since most of the data can easily be found online.

What was surprising to see was the difference between photos and videos. Videos scored 1.3 points less than photos, although the concept between the two visual content is fairly similar. It seems that photos are a better way to browse the destination and get a feeling of the atmosphere, compared to videos, although videos are more complex and multisensory. It may also be the aspect of convenience; photos are more easily browsed and are less time-consuming than watching videos.

The other features were well in between the score 2-3, meaning they have somewhat or little importance, and that major effort should not be placed on their improvement. The concentration of having a customer review system, informative texts and tips of the destination, good quality photos and integrated maps of the destination and hotel (e.g. Google Maps) is crucial, according to the research done in this thesis.

Web content feature	Average score (1-4)
User reviews and comments	3.59
Informational texts and tips	3.55
Photos	3.41
Integrated maps	3.11
Weather in destination	2.81
Comparing same criteria results on same page	2.48
Prices shown in different currencies	2.45
Examples of holiday packages	2.36
Categorizing destination by type of holiday	2.31
Videos	2.1
Personal travel account	2.08
Live chat	1.55

Table 6. Web content feature scores.

5.5 Cross-analysis

To identify the preferences of different demographic users, a simple cross-analysis was done between the age, gender and nationality of the respondent versus their preferences of web content. To simplify the findings, only the most important findings will be noted. The results from each demographic category versus the preferred web content are listed below in columns, to make the visualization of the differences more easily identifiable to the reader.

In addition to this, the chi square test will be used to give credibility and assurance to the observed results. Due to complications within the Webropol tool, the p-values for nationalities' preferences cannot be calculated, and therefore this may affect the results observed. The chi square test determines whether there is a significant difference between the observed variables, as to expected variable of two or more categories (Maben, online). A significant difference of the chi square test will be indicated if the amount is a total of 0.05 or lower.

Nationality

For the first filter of content preferences, the nationality of respondents was used. Due to complications in the analysis phase, only the major nationalities were chosen, meaning

nationalities, which had 5 or more respondents. Therefore the nationalities used were Finnish, Swedish, Chinese and British (including British/Finnish).

The results showed (Figure 15, below) that the informational and visual web contents were the most important also in these filters. Finnish and Swedish respondents seemed to give lower importance scores than those of Chinese and British, perhaps considering that many factors are equally important. Especially the Finnish preferences showed very similar scores throughout the four types of content. Chinese were found to give more importance to all content, compared to the other three nationalities, perhaps meaning that they consider web content more crucial to their purchase decision than the others.

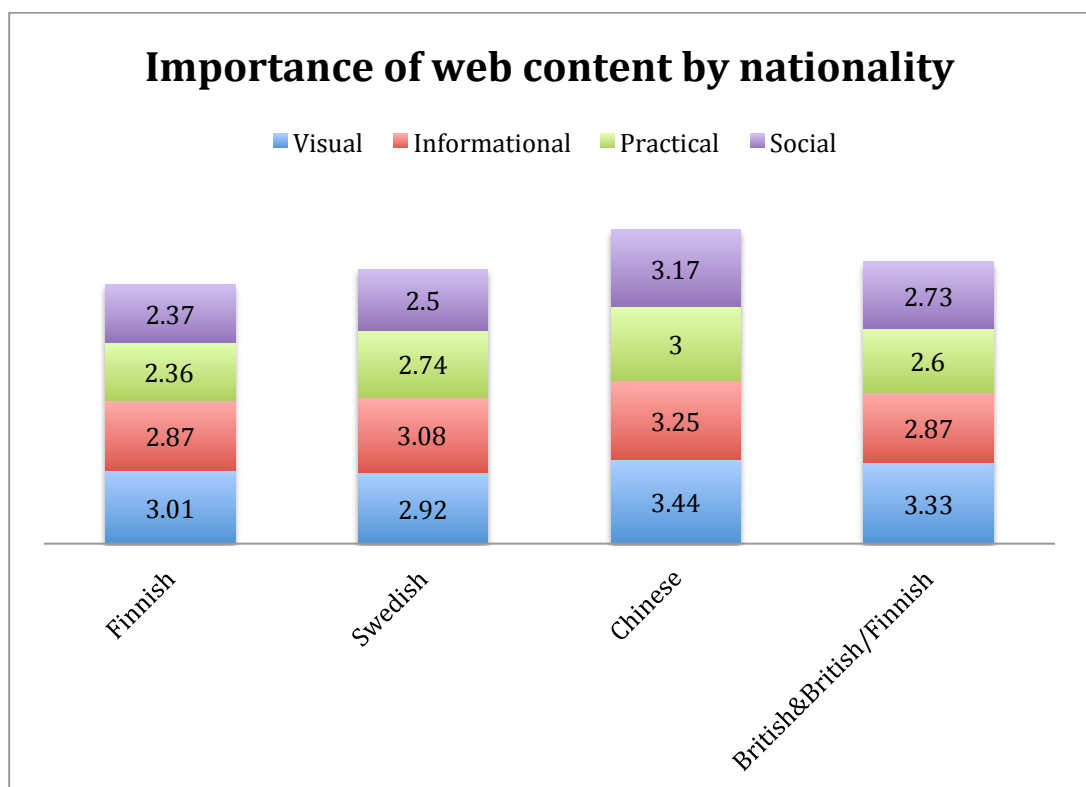


Figure 15. Importance of web content by nationality, average scores.

Age

The results from the second filter, age group, showed very little differences (see Figure 16, below). The most identifiable differences between the age groups is the group 55+, which has lower score on social web content and higher score on informational web content than the other four groups. The other remark seen is the change in importance of social content: importance decreasing by age (omitting the exception of the first age group 18-24). This is most likely due to the advance in technology and Social Media. It is com-

mon knowledge that the younger generations have a higher usage rate of social media than the older generations.

Interesting to see is also, that the age group 18-24 has the highest score of practical content than the other age groups, perhaps due to their time constraints and getting used to efficiency. As for the scores given in general, the age group 45-54 was the most critical at giving higher score of importance, compared to the other age groups.

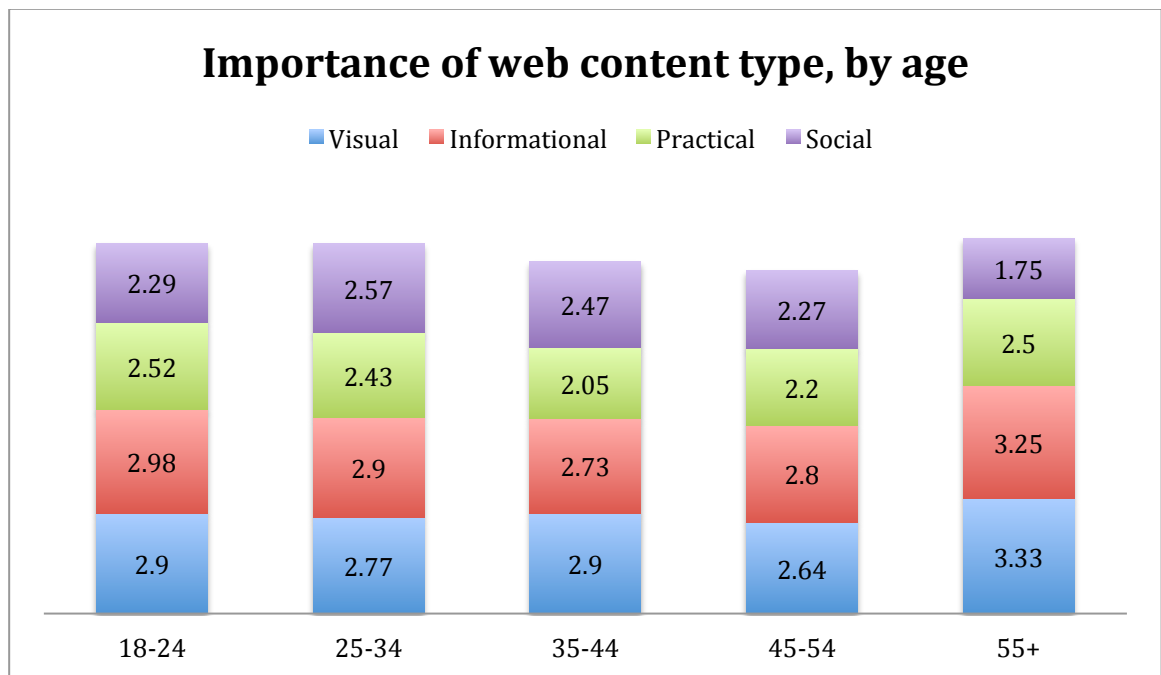


Figure 16. Importance of web content type by age group, average scores.

In addition to the scores of the web content types for each age group, the most important web content features (with highest score) are mentioned below.

- 18-24 most important feature: informational text (score 3,62)
- 25-34 most important feature: user reviews and comments (score 3,65)
- 35-44 most important feature: user reviews and comments (score 3,72)
- 45-54 most important feature: user reviews and comments (score 3,8)
- 55+ most important feature: photos (score 4)

From these can be seen that the majority of the age groups prefer the user reviews and comments, as noted in section 5.4, earlier. However, the two outer age groups 18-24 and 55+ have varied results, as can be seen. Surprising was to realize that the youngest re-

spondents received the highest score on informational text, instead of user reviews. This was also seen in the scores for social web content for these two age groups.

The chi square test showed, that there were no significant values with age as a variable, meaning that the results obtained were not dependent as such on the age. This can be seen in the results above, in which the preferences between different age groups are relatively similar, and therefore not correlated to the preferences of age groups.

Gender

The differences in the importance of different web content by gender were somewhat even, although minor differences can be analyzed. Since the division of respondents was not evenly male and female, this may be a factor affecting the outcome of results. However, the received results will nevertheless be analyzed according to gender. As can be seen in Figure 16 (below), the importance of visual web content was nearly the same between male and female respondents, meaning that both perceive it as equally important.

The bigger differences were in the other three categories. Surprisingly, the male respondents found social web content more important than females, giving a 0.16 higher average score. In contrast, female respondents scored informational and practical web content higher than the male respondents. This may mean that females prefer to collect substantial information when choosing their holidays, and feel that the usability of the website is of higher importance.

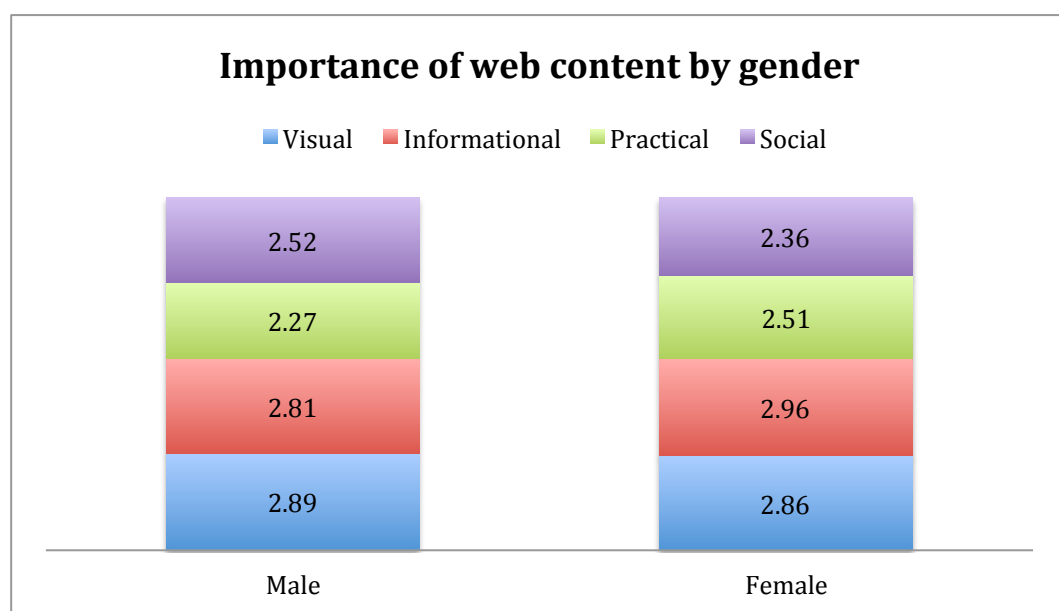


Figure 16. Importance of web content by gender, average scores.

When looking at the p-values of the chi square test, there were two web content features with significant values compared to the gender of the respondents. The possibility of showing prices in different currencies (practical content) had a value of 0,02, and the informational texts (informational content) had a value of 0,05. This is a confirmation of the abovementioned results, in which females scored higher in the practical and informational web content versus the males. Therefore, these contents are correlated to the gender of the respondents.

5.6 Results of open question

The reason behind an open question was to get clear insight into the respondents' opinions, in their own words. The question asked respondents how they would prefer to get information of their holiday online. The answer was then left blank, for the respondents to fill in with their own words. It was decided to leave this final question optional, to encourage those respondents to answer, who actually have an opinion about it. This would automatically omit most of those respondents who would otherwise answer "Nothing special", "I don't know" or something similar.

Out of the 108 respondents, 42 answered the optional question, and two of the answers were "not sure", therefore 40 responses had valuable answers to the question. Since the open question was asked in two different languages, the results were also in two different languages. Therefore, the results will firstly be analyzed separately by language, and then combined into a cohesive result.

In the Finnish survey, there were 10 respondents to the open question. The five most used words were "kautta" (through), "nettisivuilta" (from websites), "suositukset" (recommendations), "tieto" (information, knowledge) and "toisilta" (from others). Based on the most used words, the respondents of the Finnish survey rely quite a lot on customer reviews and recommendations. By analyzing the results individually and manually, the results were surprisingly varying. Two respondents answered that they would prefer to find information through other travellers, by word-of-mouth, and through blogs. Another two respondents accentuated the easiness of having a compact website with all the information collected together. Other remarks were "based on own search history", "travel magazines and websites" and "hotel introductions on hotel websites". The full list of answers to this question can be found in the appendices.

In the English version of the survey, there were 32 respondents, of which two answers were insufficient to the results of the question. The five most used words in this survey were “photos”, “email”, “reviews”, “information” and “prefer”. These words correlate closely with the actual topic of the thesis, listing some major outlets of information gathering.

From analyzing the responses manually, there were a few main similarities within the answers. One similarity emphasized getting information from other travellers via reviews, recommendations, friends etc. The other large similarity in many responses was the use of photos, and emphasizing “honest” photos, with good quality. In relation to the research, TripAhead has two main content features, which makes them special: categorizing the destinations according to holiday type, and being able to compare the results of different destinations on the same page. There were a few respondents who emphasized being able to do so:

- “I’d prefer if there is a function so that you can compare a lot of different stuff, like prices (both flight and hotel), distance from city/beach, for one destination. And also for different dates.”
- “From a website which provides information about several destinations and compares them.”

These comments are a good result for TripAhead, since they are aiming at making these features successful. Interesting was to see, that quite a few respondents mentioned receiving e-mails of current promotions, and especially with personalized deals according to the users own preferences. The full list of responses can be found in the appendices.

In general, the outcome of the respondents to the open question was surprisingly large, with 39% of respondents answering the question free-willingly. The results from this question confirm the previous analysis, that photos and user reviews/traveller experiences are considered very important when planning and choosing a holiday. However, some additional information was obtained through this question, such as many respondents still do like receiving e-mails from the holiday websites, with travel promotions. To sum up the general opinion of the respondents to the open question, they would prefer good photos, honest reviews of other travellers, promotional e-mails, searching for the information from many websites and independently, but also to have a compact website with all the abovementioned criteria within it.

6 Conclusion and Evaluation

This chapter will focus on the conclusions of the completed research analysis, and will be a base for the suggestion for improvement and development to TripAhead, as well as what they are currently doing strong in. Additionally, an evaluation of the thesis process and of the author has been added.

The goal of the thesis was to research which web content on travel websites affects the user the most into deciding the destination, getting information and purchasing a product or service from the site. Since the products on OTAs are holidays, the focus was on the purchase decision of a holiday, meaning choosing a destination, flight and hotel. In addition to this, the goal was to find out which features are most important and least important to the user, so that TripAhead could alter their website to the liking of their user.

In general, the limited timing affected the research and results in the details, e.g. the survey questions. However, the results received already give an insight into the online traveller's views and opinions on planning and booking processes.

6.1 Travellers and their travel habits

From the analysis of the online survey, a clear conclusion can be made. The majority of respondents were 18-24 of age, female and had Finnish nationality. However, there were respondents for each group of age and gender. The variety of nationalities seemed quite varied as well, but the majority amounted to Finnish, Swedish and Chinese respondents. A clear distinction in the travel habits between younger and older respondents can be made.

In general, according to this research, older travellers spend more time and money on travelling. This may be due to having more free time, steady income and the willingness and experience to travel abroad. Additionally, the elder generation has a different grasp on Internet use, which may very well explain the high use of Online Travel Agencies amongst the Category 2 respondents. The younger generation of Internet users preferred to use nearly all types of websites in order to find what they are looking for, taking matters into their own hands. This seemed to be the clearest distinction between the two categories of respondents.

Since the current target market of TripAhead is experienced and independent travellers in the older generations (approximately 30-50 years old), the success of an OTA seems optimistic according to the results of the older respondents in this research.

6.2 Preferred web content

As for the preferred web content, the results showed that overall; respondents prefer visual and informational web content, since these help in choosing the destination. Social and practical content was deemed as secondary to the abovementioned web content. This may be due to the idea of which web content helps in choosing the destination, instead of how is it easiest to book a holiday. Nevertheless, the obtained information can still be used as an advantage, since the choosing of a destination and planning phase is clearly linked with the booking and purchasing.

The results of individual web content features showed, that respondents found user reviews and comments to be the most important feature online, affecting their decision. This is most likely due to the honesty of other travellers, and is excluded from the marketing strategies of the company, giving the user real insight of the product or service. The next most important features were photos and informational text, which is consistent with the visual and informational web content being the most important. The least important features were found to be live chat and personal holiday account.

The author had predicted similar results of the most important features, but some of the results from the open question proved surprising. The results of the open question gave much insight into the honest opinions of the respondents. These results proved that many users like receiving promotions based on their travel preferences to their e-mail, and this was considered interesting, since it is often thought that nobody wants e-mails from companies in fear of spam. This is essentially what a personal travel account is, so it was interesting to see that the open question results and the feature results were not in unison.

According to the cross-analysis done, no large-scale differences could be seen in the preferences of different respondent groups, although smaller differences were visible. However, with a larger pool of respondents, the differences would possibly be seen more clearly. It is safe to say that the demographics of the respondents do, in fact, have a say in the results of the preferred web content, and therefore the target market should be chosen accordingly.

Overall, the respondents' preferred web content seemed to include lots of visualization, but with good quality (e.g. good quality photos). Honesty was also considered a big issue, from the user reviews getting the highest scores, as well as the open question resulting in responses about the importance of honesty in reviews, tips, marketing, photos and informative texts on the website.

6.3 Suggestions for TripAhead

Based on the results obtained from the research done, the author has a few suggestions for the current state and the future of TripAhead's operations. Firstly, the results showed that there was truly a slight interest in the features, which are unique to TripAhead (destination according to type of holiday, and comparing results of same criteria on one page). According to the results from the research, there is a potential success amongst the higher competition for these. Therefore, the author advises TripAhead to keep these features, but to simplify them in a way that the user can easily access and understand them.

Next, a customer review system seems to be something that TripAhead should include in their website, perhaps in a separate travel forum, where users can exchange opinions, or simply a "comment" section on all destinations, as well as the possibility to score the destination. Since the hotels and flights both come from external websites, the scoring of these may be more difficult to include into TripAhead's website. By having a review or customer comments section on the website, TripAhead will be able to interact better with their users, get more insight on their preferences and opinions, as well as increase the website performance.

Since TripAhead currently has purchased photos of high quality on their website, the author suggest to keep these, but perhaps increase the variety of photos. The respondents wished to see "honest" photos, and perhaps these could be implemented in the review section of the website, into which users can upload their personal photos from the destination. Also, TripAhead currently has a great information system: short and simple texts about the destination as a whole, the major attractions, as well as other short tips for the user. These are a great way to attract the travellers into reading about the destination on their webpages, another upside to the existing web content of TripAhead.

TripAhead may additionally want to look into the possibility of offering an e-newsletter once their customer base has grown. This may be to give knowledge of general promo-

tions to those who have signed up to the newsletter, or perhaps personalized promotions according to the resources that can be put in to making this.

For the future of the company, it is suggested that there will be further research done into the preferences of the customer target market. Since the company currently does not have sufficient purchases, this was not possible to do at the current state. Once the company has succeeded into getting enough purchases from the target market, they should research into the preferences of their existing customers. The future research should also indicate more than the 12 used features, perhaps using all of the major features which exist on TripAhead's website, and those that are in the process of being added. This will also give a more detailed insight into the user experience of using only TripAhead's website, versus travel websites in general. The research done was a base to their potential users, but yet remains in more broader and general terms in relation to the small start-up company's target market.

6.4 Evaluation of thesis process and research

The initial thesis process began already in September 2014, when the thesis topic, commissioning party and thesis supervisor were chosen. At the time, no timetable for completion was set, and therefore very little was completed during the mentioned fall. The writing of the theoretical part of the thesis began finally in December 2014, but the majority of the thesis was written, researched and analyzed within January 2015, a very short period of over a month.

Once the majority of the thesis was completed, a thesis presentation was given, and feedback collected. Soon after this, the author needed to move to China, during which time, very little was done concerning the thesis. Finally, in March of 2015, the adjustments and feedback were incorporated into the thesis, and a final version was completed and sent.

This being said, timing was the biggest challenge and limitation to the thesis process. Not enough time was given into the research and decision of making the online survey, as well as completing the theory well in advance.

However, the outcome of thesis resulted in the hoped manner, and the process went rather smoothly, although the given time was scarce, and there were some cutbacks and amounts of time, in which nothing was done towards the completion of the thesis. Once

the author grasped the thesis as a whole, and completed the table of content, the process of creating the thesis started to roll in an efficient manner.

The completed online survey collected the hoped information and outcome, although one of the questions was flawed and therefore disqualified from the analysis. The survey collected more than enough respondents, of which 100% were qualified responses, and could all be used in the analysis. With more time, the author could have narrowed down the target market of the online survey, however at this time it was not possible. Additionally, the author could have opted for a larger amount of respondents, in the range of 200-300 to get even more reliable results, however, over 100 respondents were considered reliable enough.

Some other feedback regarding the survey came from one of the online travel forums, in which a respondent noted that the Finnish survey was not completely fluently made, as well as “travel times” was not identified as being either leisure or business, or both. These factors may have affected the results in a minor way, but with sufficient planning and time could have been avoided. Therefore, the surveys would have needed more time, more knowledge, more theoretical framework and finally more information. As the collection of the data progressed, the author started noticing minor error, or things that would have been better in another way, for example the layout of the survey, the chosen features for each content category, as well as additional questions that could have been asked.

However, the collection of data and its analysis proved easy and very interesting to the author, because these were the results of the thesis as a whole, which were being analyzed. The author found interesting that some features received very poor scores, very unexpected to her personal predictions. Also, it was pleasing to see that so many of the respondents opted to answer the open question, although it was optional.

Additionally, the author could have been more in contact with the thesis supervisor throughout the process. The essential outline and contents of thesis were agreed and discussed upon together with the supervisor. The author preferred to work more independently, and felt that the constant help of the supervisor was not necessary.

6.5 Self-evaluation

Completing the thesis proved to be the biggest and most difficult task during the 3,5 years of studies at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. Although many skills were ac-

quired prior to writing the thesis, the author lacked expertise, which may have affected the course of the thesis. Needless to say, the knowledge gained from writing the thesis is extensive, and the interest towards the topic grew as time went on. In addition to this, the author personally felt that the topic was not very familiar to her before completing the advanced placement and the thesis. The interest in the topic grew during the beginning phase of doing her advanced placement for TripAhead, and therefore the thesis topic was chosen as an interesting topic, but also as a personal challenge.

As a brief self-evaluation, the author feels that the physical writing of the thesis she completed very well, with fluent English and good writing-skills. The process of collecting sufficient and reliable sources for the theoretical framework proved to be the biggest challenge, and took much effort. In return, the author has learned how best to search for data, and how to use the thesis guidelines and sourcing regulations. Also, the author has gathered more knowledge and insight into the theory and practice of different web content, and their actual effect on the consumer. Time management has been an issue as well, but during January 2015 the author made sufficient progress due to well-planned time management schedule.

Overall, the thesis has been a great effort and quite difficult to produce, but it is rewarding to accomplish this level of work and knowledge, as well as being proud of completing the thesis on time. Additionally, the author feels that the thesis has helped in understanding the effort needed in a task this large, and feels relieved that the outcome will result in graduation and a degree.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 English Online Survey

1. Nationality *

2. Age *

☐ 18-24

☐ 25-34

☐ 35-44

☐ 45-55

☐ 55+

3. Gender *

☐ Male

☐ Female

4. How many times do you travel per year? *

☐ 1-2 times

☐ 3-4 times

☐ 5-6 times

☐ 7 times or more

5. How much are you willing to spend on hotel and flights of a holiday? *

☐ under 300€

☐ 300-500€

☐ 501-600€

☐ 601-700€

☐ over 700€

6. What websites do you use when planning a holiday? Choose all that apply. *

☐ Search engines (Google, Bing etc.)

☐ Informational websites (Official Tourism websites, Lonely Planet etc.)

☐ Flight websites (British Airways, Skyscanner etc.)

☐ Hotel Websites (booking.com, hotels.com etc.)

☐ Online Travel Agencies (Ebookers, Kilroy etc.)

7. How important are the following visual features of a travel website? *

	Not important at all	Very little importance	Somewhat important	Very important
Photos	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Videos	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Integrated Maps (e.x. Google Maps)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. How important are the following informational features of a travel website? *

	Not important at all	Very little importance	Somewhat important	Very important
Informational text and tips of a destination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Weather info of destination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Examples of holiday packages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. How important are the following practical features of a travel website? *

	Not important at all	Very little importance	Somewhat important	Very important
Prices shown in different currencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Categorising destination based on type of holiday (beach, romance, city etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Comparing destinations of same criteria on same page	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. How important are the following social features of a travel website? *

	Not important at all	Very little importance	Somewhat important	Very important
User reviews and comments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal travel account	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Live chat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[<-- Edellinen](#)

[Seuraava -->](#)

11. When purchasing a holiday, which of the features affect your decision the most? Mark in order of importance, 1= most important, 4= least important. *

	1	2	3	4
Photos	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informational text of destination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Categorising destination according to type of holiday	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
User reviews and comments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. How would you prefer to get information of travel destinations and holidays online?

[<-- Edellinen](#)

[Lähetä](#)

Appendix 2 Finnish Online Survey

1. Kansallisuus *

2. Ikä *

☐ 18-24

☐ 25-34

☒ 35-44

☐ 45-54

☐ 55+

3. Sukupuoli *

☐ Mies

☐ Nainen

Seuraava -->

4. Kuinka monesti matkustat vuodessa? *

☐ 1-2 kertaa

☐ 3-4 kertaa

☐ 5-6 kertaa

☐ 7 kertaa tai enemmän

5. Kuinka paljon olet valmis maksamaan matkastasi (hotelli ja lennot)? *

☐ alle 300€

☐ 300-500€

☐ 501-600€

☐ 601-700€

☐ yli 700€

6. Mitä sivustoja käytät suunnitellessasi matkaasi? Valitse kaikki soveltuvat vaihtoehdot. *

☐ Hakukoneet (Google, Bing yms.)

☐ Tietoa antavat nettisivut (Visit Helsinki, Lonely Planet yms.)

☐ Lentoyhtiö sivustot (Finnair, Skyscanner yms.)

☒ Hotelli sivustot (booking.com, Sokos Hotels yms.)

☐ Online-matkatoimistot (Kilroy, ebookers yms.)

<-- Edellinen Seuraava -->

7. Kuinka tärkeitä ovat seuraavat sivustojen visuaaliset ominaisuudet? *

	Ei tärkeä	Hieman tärkeä	Melko tärkeä	Erittäin tärkeä
Kuvat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Videot	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Integroidut kartat (esim. Google Maps)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Kuinka tärkeitä ovat seuraavat sivustojen tietoa antavat ominaisuudet? *

	Ei tärkeä	Hieman tärkeä	Melko tärkeä	Erittäin tärkeä
Tietoa antavat tekstit kohteesta	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tietoa kohteen säästä	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Esimerkki matkapaketista	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Kuinka tärkeitä ovat seuraavat sivustojen käytännölliset ominaisuudet? *

	Ei tärkeä	Hieman tärkeä	Melko tärkeä	Erittäin tärkeä
Hinnat eri valuutoilla	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kohteiden luokittelu matkan tyyppin mukaisesti (ranta, romanssi, kaupunki yms.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Samojen kriteerien perusteella valittujen kohteiden vertailu samalla sivulla	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Kuinka tärkeitä ovat seuraavat sivustojen sosiaaliset ominaisuudet? *

	Ei tärkeä	Hieman tärkeä	Melko tärkeä	Erittäin tärkeä
Käyttäjä-arvostelut ja kommentit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Henkilökohtainen matkatili (jonne voi esim. tallentaa suosikkikohteet)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Live chat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[< Edellinen](#)

[Seuraava >](#)

11. Ostaessasi matkaa, mitkä näistä vaikuttavat valintaasi eniten? Luokittele tärkeysjärjestyksessä, 1= tärkein, 4= vähiten tärkein. *

	1	2	3	4
Kuvat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tietoa antavat tekstit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kohteiden luokittelu matkan tyyppin mukaan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Käyttäjä-arvostelut ja kommentit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

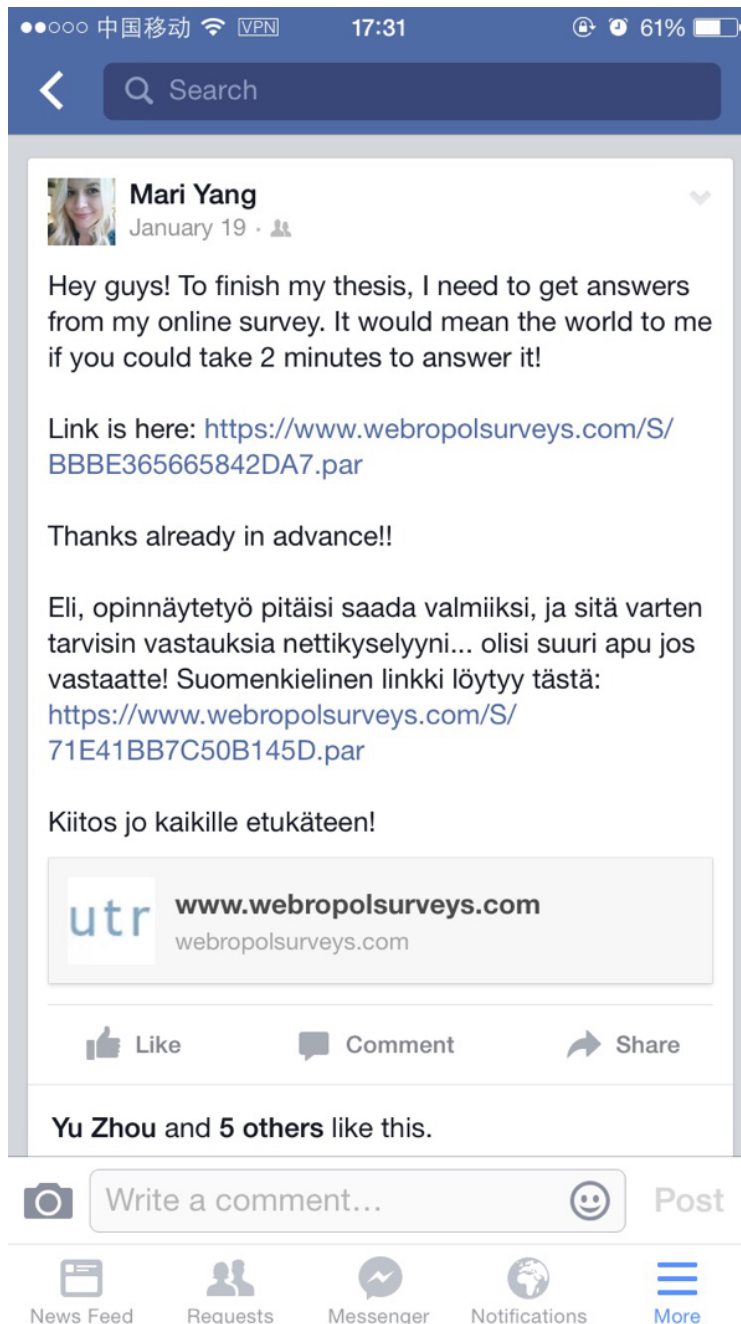
12. Miten haluaisit saada tietoa matkoista ja kohteista verkossa?

[< Edellinen](#)

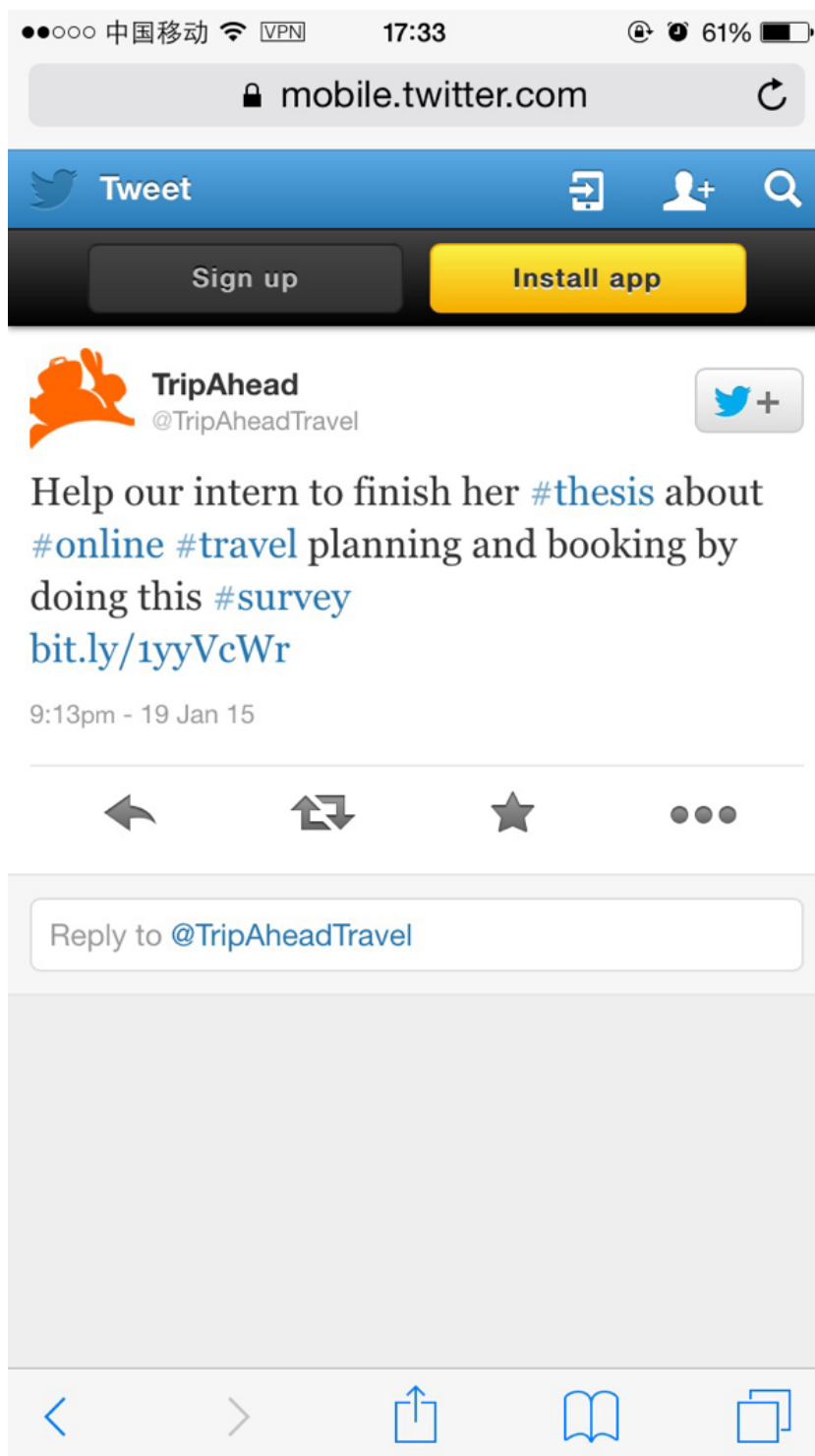
[Lähetä](#)

Appendix 3. Distribution of the survey: Facebook

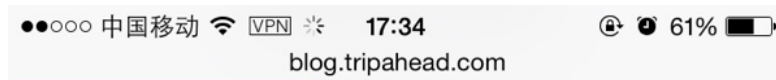




Appendix 4. Distribution of survey: Twitter



Appendix 5. Distribution of survey: Blog



≡ MENU

How do you plan your holiday?

JANUARY 19, 2015 ~ 4 COMMENTS

Hello all travellers!

I am doing an online survey for the purpose of my thesis related to planning and booking holidays online.

Since you're all travellers, it would be great if you could take two minutes of your time to answer the survey.

You can find the survey [here](#).

Appendix 6. English Online Survey, Question 12 answers.

- Not sure.
- Pictures & videos, reviews
- Email
- Videos and photos are nice, but can also be manipulated for marketing purpose, so I prefer to read (hear) other people's opinions on travel destinations and their travel experiences.
- With pictures and reviews and tips
- More realistic marketing. Photos and customer reviews should be shown as they are so that you don't get the wrong picture of the destination.
- Advertising email or sales promote pdf.
- not particularly sure
- through travel agencies webpage
- guest house, backpacker
- website
- email
- Advertisements in Fb about ongoing sales
- Photos and user review
- I like lots of information written about the destination and sites and would love it if some history was attached to the information to develop my interest and some kind of educated background and I never have time before to look for the history by myself.
- Email with clear prices and photos attached, as well as dates clearly showing the offers. Also, I would like emails to advertise holidays suitable for me personally for e.g. taking into account age, beach or city deals depending on the season.
- From a website which provides information about several destinations and compares them.
- Using search engine with my own criteria
- To get a news letter to email
- users' recommendations and informational text destination would be equally relevant when making decision
- websites
- Email
- Hotel websites, Flight websites
- I prefer to go on websites and browse there. Or get some emails from the search engine, like napsu.fi, but not so often, as it comes from booking.com, for example, cuz it is annoying sometimes.
- By my friends, facebook, etc
- I prefer independent reviews.
- Not via advertisement. If I want to travel I want to look up the information by myself.
- Informative text and photos.
- Word of mouth, recommendations
- I'd prefer if there is a function so that you can compare a lot of different stuff, like prices (both flight and hotel), distance from city/beach, for one destination. And also for different dates.
- Photos and honest texts of information (including subjective reviews) works the best for me.
- I don't really know, but from my experience it can be hard to find all the necessary information on most pages. Like for instance it would be nice to know the average cost of a meal, cab rides etc.

Appendix 7. Finnish Online Survey, Question 12 answers.

- Nettisivuilta / sovelluksilla
- Oman tutkimustyön kautta
- Suositukset henkilö profiloinnin jälkeen säännöllisesti
- Toisten reissaajien blogit joita googlalla löytää ovat itselle yksi tärkeimmistä tiedon hankintakanavista, kun jotain matkaa suunnittelen.
- mieluiten matkanjärjestäjien sivuilta, ettei tarvisi googlaa monesta paikkaa.
- Hakupalvelujen kautta ja selkeiltä nettisivuilta, jonne koottu monipuolisesti matkakohteita, joista löytyisi suhteellisen kattavasti mutta tiiviisti tietoa esim aktiviteeteista ja käytännön tiedoista. Mitä enemmän tietoa löytyy yhden sivuston kautta, sen parempi!
- Toisilta ihmisiltä. Todenmukaisempaa kuin virallinen tieto.
- Nousevan trendin kohteet voisivat kiinnostaa monia.
- Matkalehdistä ja netistä
- -hotelliesittelyt
 - käyttäjäkokemukset hotelleista esim. Linkki tripadvisorin sivulle, jossa hotelliarvosteluja. Tärkeä kriteeri hotellin ja kohteen valinnassa
 - matkakertomukset kohteesta